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ABSTRACT

Educational Service Agencies (ESA's) are public education agencies that provide specialized programs and services to a group of school districts in a specified geographical region and to the state department of education. Most states have encouraged the development of ESA's that have either evolved out of county districts or have been created to provide technical assistance, innovation, economies of scale, or more professional service delivery to local school districts. This research examined nine ESA's in five states to explore the dynamics of successful intergovernmental collaboration. At the sites, 300 intensive, semistructured interviews were conducted with state education officials, state legislators, ESA staff, ESA board members, local superintendents, other local district staff, and local school board members knowledgeable about the creation, growth, and performance of the ESA. Data from observation and organizational records were also collected. Results show how the external political and legal context influences ESA performance and how ESA managers respond to constraints in their environment. Findings will be of interest to scholars in the fields of educational policymaking, implementation, and organizational theory; to practitioners in state and local education agencies that have contact with ESA's; and to ESA administrators. (Author/TE)

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Managing Cooperation and Complexity in Education: The Case of Educational Service Agencies

Final Report to the National Institute of Education

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Managing Cooperation and Complexity in Education:
The Case of Educational Service Agencies

Final Report to the National Institute of Education

Janet A. Weiss

Principal Investigator
University of Michigan

February 1984

With the Research Assistance of
Frederick Norling and Mark Hymel

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Abstract

Managing Cooperation and Complexity in Education: The Case of Educational Service Agencies

Janet A. Weiss
Principal Investigator

Educational service agencies (ESAs) are public education agencies that provide specialized programs and services to a group of school districts in a specified geographical region and the state department of education. Most states have encouraged the development of ESAs that have either evolved out of county districts or have been created to provide technical assistance, innovation, economies of scale, or more professional service delivery to local school districts. This research examined nine ESAs in five states to explore the dynamics of successful intergovernmental collaboration. At the nine sites, 300 intensive, semi-structured interviews were conducted with state education officials, state legislators, ESA staff, ESA board members, local superintendents, other local district staff, and local school board members knowledgeable about the creation, growth, and performance of the ESA. Data from observation and organizational records were also collected. Results show how the external political and legal context influences ESA performance and how ESA managers respond to constraints in their environment. Findings will be of interest to scholars in the fields of educational policy making, implementation, and organization theory, to practitioners in state and local education agencies that have contact with ESAs, and to ESA administrators.

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Finally I am deeply grateful to the people at the nine ESAs and their local school districts for allowing us to learn so much about them and their organizations. They gave us access, time, and hospitality, as well as the benefits of their insights.

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Chapter 1

Introduction to Educational Service Agencies and the Research

If public education ever was a strictly local affair, it is no longer. The organization of school districts, certification of teachers, choice of textbooks, constraints on curriculum, determination of racial composition, requirements for specialized services for handicapped, bilingual, and disadvantaged students -- all may be imposed in whole or in part on a school by some outside agency. In the 1980s, localities pay less than half of school costs; the remainder comes from state and federal sources. Today local districts must provide schools that please not only local taxpayers, elected officials, interest groups, and parents but are also responsive to the demands of their patrons and regulators in the larger governmental arena.

The regulation is reciprocal. Federal education policies are empty words without implementation in local schools. State departments of education are similarly hostage to local cooperation. Educational policy in the United States is a web of cross-cutting regulations, legislation, bargaining, and mutual influence that has grown increasingly intricate. In response, a growing proportion of education policy requires inter-school, inter-district, or inter-governmental collaboration. Indeed this trend in policy design is spreading throughout the domestic arenas of government. But it is difficult to plan patterns of interaction likely to produce desired outcomes. All educational innovations, from computers to Head Start, are still crucially shaped by the pulling and hauling among legislatures, bureaucracies, and schools during the policy making and implementation process. To analyze this interplay of major education actors and its effects on the viability of educational programs, this research focused on one interorganizational arrangement, which I will call an educational service agency (ESA).

A. Educational Service Agencies as Vehicles for Education Policy and Cooperation

The ESAs we studied have several defining characteristics: (1) An ESA's principal (and usually exclusive) activity is to provide specialized services to state and local public education agencies. (2) An ESA serves more than one local education agency in a well-defined geographical region (often one or more counties) but does not serve all local education agencies in a state. (3) An ESA operates as a public agency, subject to state education codes. (In one case we studied, the ESA was a private agency, but the terms of its public funding forced it to operate like a public agency in nearly all respects.) (4) An ESA must serve both state purposes and local purposes; it is governed by state law on one side and local school boards and local superintendents on the other side.

ESAs are commonly justified on two grounds. First they improve service delivery to local school districts by making available supplementary services to students, teachers, local administrators, and state administrators that no single district is likely to provide on its own. Second they offer the possibility for economies of scale by pooling the resources of several districts and addressing educational needs with common expertise, equipment, and supplies. Most states now have a network of ESAs that has either evolved out of county or other regional school oversight mechanisms, or has been deliberately established to provide technical assistance, innovation, or service delivery to regional groups of local districts.

ESAs may take many shapes and forms, and may grow from different roots. Some were started by local districts, others by state law, others by state agencies trying to decentralizer, others still in response to federal funding opportunities. Some are large and entrepreneurial; others are small and passive. Some are wealthy; others operate on a shoe string. Some provide a narrow range of services (e.g. limited to special education or vocational training) and some offer sophisticated multi-service operations (e.g. in-service professional training, bulk purchasing of textbooks, vocational counseling and resource centers, dissemination of innovative curricula, data processing facilities, and others).

The variety of organizational forms and missions is reflected in the welter of names for ESAs. Some states call them regional educational service centers, others use boards of cooperative services (BOCES), educational service units or districts, regional education service agencies, intermediate school districts, county school districts, area education agencies, educational collaboratives, regional resource centers, etc. Similar diversity may be found in the ways that ESAs (as I call the generic type) are funded and governed. The variety of names is not wholly frivolous; different names reflect differences in the historical, legal, and political origins of regional cooperation in the states. Although we can slide past the name problem, we will return to the historical, legal, and political differences among the states, for they exercise crucial influence on the development of ESAs.

A major attraction of ESAs as sites for this research is that they are embedded in an intergovernmental setting. Many ESAs were first planned and operated with federal funds from Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which called for "a program for supplementary centers and services, to stimulate and assist in the provision of vitally needed educational services..." (cited in Bailey and Mosher, 1968). Initially the U.S. Office of Education (OE) awarded these grants directly to groups of local school districts. In 1968 ESEA was amended by the Congress so that state education agencies could review, and, if necessary, veto local proposals. During the early years of ESEA considerable funding was channelled into regional initiatives, not only from Title III but also from Titles II (for library resources) and V (for strengthening state resources). Later federal funding of large categorical programs, especially for vocational and special education, also found its way into the hands of ESAs.

State legislatures and state education agencies have been more intimately involved in the creation and development of ESAs. Some ESAs are lineal descendents of county education offices that were created in some states to supervise local school districts, especially small, rural districts. Other ESAs grew out of state efforts to improve state monitoring and assistance to local schools. All states create the legal climate in which ESAs must operate, by placing restrictions on ESA activities (for example, their financial and personnel practices), and by mandating policy directions that local districts and ESAs must pursue (for example, requirements for instruction in special education or basic skills). Many states also pay a large share of ESA budgets through direct allocations for administrative expenses, state reimbursement for students served in ESA programs, competitive grants and contracts awarded to ESAs, or through funding that officially goes to local districts but is designated to be spent for ESA services. In all states, the legislatures play a general and continuing role in shaping state wide educational policy, most directly perhaps by the level of funding that the state devotes to public education and the formula for the allocation of those funds to districts.

The state education agencies (SEAs) also have significant influence on the development and success of ESAs. Some SEAs have a history of strong control over policy in local districts (for example New York and California), while other states have adopted a hands off policy to foster local control (for example New Hampshire and Texas). State education agencies regulate local access to both state and federal funding and may reward (or punish) local districts for their participation (or lack of participation) in cooperative or regional efforts. Depending on their own strength and competence, SEAs may also be able to facilitate ESA operation by offering technical consulting, assessments of educational needs, or other professional assistance, or by creating a political climate that fosters cooperation among local school districts.

Finally, however, an educational service agency stands or falls on the strength of local district participation. Federal grant support never lasts very long. Although states may devote considerable resources to ESAs, success in providing efficient and effective services depends ultimately on the local districts' needs for supplemental services and their acceptance of ESAs as legitimate suppliers of those services. Local judgment that ESA services are desirable, local participation in ESA governance and planning, and the local allocation of scarce resources for selected services are the last critical links in the intergovernmental chain.

Federal support, state legislation and supervision, and local initiative have all been central to the growth of ESAs. ESAs are not unique in this regard; in fact, they present an attractive focus for research because they are examples of policies made and implemented within an interdependent network of agencies.

A handful of previous studies of ESAs has examined their size, dispersion, legal obligations, and activities (Stephens, 1978; Davis, 1976) and their contributions to knowledge dissemination (Yin and Gwaltney, 1981; Huberman et al., 1981). This report has a somewhat different agenda in its concern with explanation and analysis of the existence and proliferation of ESAs. First, this research focuses on the policy roles of ESAs: What difference does it make to school districts in a region or to a state education agency to have access to an ESA? How well do ESAs satisfy the policy roles thrust on them? Second, the research explores the strategies that an ESA employs to become an accepted part of the web of relationships among state and local agencies that predate the ESA. How is an ESA able to exist at all in a potentially hostile setting? Third, the research examines differences between successful and unsuccessful ESA efforts to elicit state and local support and collaboration for regional programs and activities: Why are some ESAs more successful than others along a mix of criteria?

These questions emerge from a theoretical perspective on relationships among organizations based on several research traditions. First I assume that ESAs have come to exist because some constituencies believed that their interests would be furthered by the establishment of ESAs. ESAs continue to exist because some constituencies (probably, but not necessarily, the same ones that supported their creation) continue to believe that their interests are or will be served by ESA operations. These assumptions grow out of a model of bureaucratic politics (Allison, 1971), mutual adjustment (Lindblom, 1965), or multiple stakeholders (Bryk, 1983) that portrays organizational environments as the composite of the actions of many parties with somewhat different stakes, needs, and priorities for the performance of public agencies. The assumption leads me to questions about the original expectations for ESA performance (What did their various constituents originally expect them to accomplish?), and current expectations (How do their various constituents assess their performance now?). The perspective highlights the interdependence of ESAs with a network of other agencies and stake-holders and suggests the folly of trying to understand the ESA as a free-standing organization. In their creation, the unfolding of their history, and their current operation, ESAs must respond to a complex, political system.

Second, I assume that ESAs respond to their interdependence with all these outside claimants by trying to establish a legitimate and stable place for themselves (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Aldrich, 1980; Meyer and Scott, 1983). ESAs are not passive receptacles for others to manipulate. I assume that they proactively seek support and resources from their constituencies. Neither legitimacy nor an adequate resource base is automatically available to ESAs. Through their choices about program areas and skills to develop and through their cultivation of relationships with outside groups, ESAs must work to please their constituents. If they succeed, they are able to obtain a stable flow of support. If ESAs define their mission carefully and persuade others of the value of that mission, they are able to create a legitimate role for themselves in a set of organizations that predates the creation of the ESAs.

Third, I assume that some ESAs are more successful than others in defining and executing their mission. Success is assumed to be multidimensional: including elements of organizational survival, growth or size, professional expertise or reputation for expertise, and political acumen in not threatening the positions of powerful constituents while also generating respect and enthusiasm among multiple constituents. Part of the variation in success is due to the external pressures on ESA development and part is due to the strategy and management policies pursued by ESA staff.

B. Method

The method we used to answer these questions required intensive study of a limited number of sites carefully chosen to permit variation along critical variables of theoretical importance. The case studies done at each site were structured on some dimensions to permit comparisons across sites, but unstructured enough to permit us to capture the particular character of each site.

Because ESAs develop within an historical, legal, and political context that is importantly shaped by state policy and politics, the first step in sampling was to map some of the differences among the fifty states. After extensive review of previous research on ESAs and the politics of education in the states and preliminary interviews with people knowledgeable about ESAs, two variables seemed critical to the viability of inter-district cooperation. First was the relationship between the state education agency (SEA) and the local school districts. In some states, the SEA exercises considerable, detailed control over local district activity. In others, the SEA exercises more restraint, leaving most control to local school boards and administrators. The relative strength and autonomy of local districts in setting educational directions seemed important to consider in assessing their participation in regional cooperation and their likely receptivity to ESA services. To gauge local strength and autonomy across states, we examined research on state politics, education mandates, and financing patterns (for example, Wirt, 1976; Murphy, 1975).

The second, critical variable was the legal basis of the relationship between local school districts and ESAs. In states with ESAs, state education codes restrict some aspects of that relationship. For example, in some states, all local districts are required by law to be members of designated ESAs. In other states, membership is optional. In some states local districts are required to participate in certain ESA activities. In others, participation is a matter for locals to decide. In some states, the major funding for ESAs comes from the state. In others, local districts are required to pay for ESA programs. In still others, local districts choose whether to purchase ESA programs. To get a reading on the variations in legal constraints, we examined the legal codes of a dozen states bearing on ESAs.

From these two variables, we identified four states that offered considerable diversity: Massachusetts, West Virginia, Washington, and Michigan. The states vary demographically (geographical region of the county, wealth, urban/rural composition) as well as educationally. On the two critical variables, Michigan and Washington both have strong SEAs with significant centralization of policy authority, although both also have a healthy respect for local control. West Virginia has a relatively weak SEA but state-controlled financing dominates local spending. Massachusetts has a relatively weak SEA, a small state share of financing, and a strong tradition of local control. The ESAs in the four states vary in legal status, activity, and financing. In Michigan, the ESAs grew out of a county system, have legal boundaries designated by the state, mandatory participation by local districts, some direct state funding, and are authorized to levy direct taxes with the approval of the voters. In Washington, the ESAs were also established by the state (and have been continually reorganized by the state board of education), have required local membership, significant state funding, and state-required local funding. In West Virginia, the state established ESAs but local membership is discretionary. The state pays most of the cost of ESA operations, with local funding voluntary for the districts. In Massachusetts, the ESAs are permitted under state law, but it is up to local districts to establish them, participate in them, and pay for them. The

ESA networks that emerge from these four environments vary considerably in size, complexity, politicization, and programmatic emphasis.

In addition to these four states, we conducted an extensive case study at an ESA in Connecticut (chosen on grounds of convenience rather than theoretical import) as a pilot study. I include the results of that study in this report because it provides a useful comparison to the other states.

Having selected the states, the next research task was to select two ESAs within each state. To enable comparisons among ESAs of differing levels of effectiveness, we collected information on all ESAs in the four states from state officials knowledgeable about ESAs. Data on ESA program offerings and budget, evidence about levels of local participation in ESA activities, and ESA reputation among state officials were the three dimensions of effectiveness that we considered in selecting sites. In each state we interviewed state officials and went through available archival data to assess these three dimensions. When several ESAs seemed equally high or low in effectiveness, we chose ESAs that differed in geographical location, aiming for one predominantly urban and one predominantly rural ESA in each state. In West Virginia the small number of ESAs made it impossible to achieve much variation on the urban/rural dimension, although we did choose ESAs in two different regions of the state. In Washington, we had something of the same problem but we did find one predominantly urban ESA and one ESA with mostly rural districts but including an urban area as well. Evidence on the diversity of our sites is presented in Table 1.

After selecting sites on the basis of initial interviews with state officials, we visited the sites to seek permission to study them in detail. We were fortunate to receive unanimous cooperation from the preselected sites, so that substitutions were not required.

Our method had three prongs, which we pursued simultaneously. First we collected data about the state context. We interviewed those SEA officials in each state who had most contact with ESAs for administrative or programmatic reasons. We also interviewed state legislators and/or legislative staffers active in elementary and secondary education issues. We collected copies of reports, testimony, laws, regulations, memos, and other documents to amplify or support information obtained through interviews.

Second we collected data about the history and development of the ESAs. A priori we had identified three groups of people to interview about how an ESA establishes itself and operates in a network of school districts: current or former ESA central or administrative staff, current or former ESA program or instructional staff, and current or former members of the ESA governing board. We interviewed all current central staff, all former directors or superintendents who could be located, a sample of current program staff, former program staff who were widely considered by other respondents to be important and who still resided in the ESA region, a sample of members of the governing board, and former board members reported by other respondents to be important and who still resided in the ESA region. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, we spent several days at each site as observers, attended board meetings, examined budgetary and staff records, collected brochures about services and programs, newspaper clippings about ESA activity,

Table 1
Selected Characteristics of ESA Sites

	Number of Districts	District Types	Membership Required	Annual Budget	Date of Establishment	Predecessor Agency
Connecticut Educational Service Centers						
Joint ESC	21	Urban/Suburban	No	7,000,000	1973	Title III proj.
Massachusetts Collaboratives						
Urban Collab	14	Urban/Suburban	No	6,000,000	1969	Title III proj.
Rural Collab	18	Rural	No	200,000	1972	Title III proj.
West Virginia Regional Education Service Agencies						
RESA A	5	Urban/Rural	No	750,000	1972	None
RESA B	3	Urban/Rural	No	300,000	1972	None
Michigan Intermediate School Districts						
Arrow ISD	12	Urban/Suburban	Yes	14,500,000	1962	County districts
Wilderness ISD	14	Rural	Yes	4,000,000	1963	County districts
Washington Educational Service Districts						
ESD East	60	Urban/Rural	Yes	7,000,000	1969	County districts
ESD West	36	Urban/Suburban	Yes	4,000,000	1967	County districts

and internal reports and correspondence, read minutes of board meetings, and obtained any other archival evidence available at particular sites.

Third we collected data about key constituencies of the ESAs. Again, before we visited our sites we identified several key groups to interview: local school superintendents, other local school district staff with considerable contact with the ESA, local school board members, members of parent advisory groups, and state officials with active involvement in ESA activities who were not picked up in our interviewing at the state level. Where respondents had documents or correspondence to support their answers to our questions, we collected further archival records.

All interviews were semi-structured. Formal interviews were done face-to-face with one or two interviewers taking notes and using a tape-recorder. Informal interviews, usually much shorter, were done over meals, in the hall, or on the telephone to pursue particular points or get clarification on answers to questions asked during more formal interviews. They were not tape-recorded. The distribution of formal interviews is displayed in Table 2. Many of the documents and records collected are described in Table 3.

C. Analysis

This report includes the first two stages of analysis of these data. (The third and final stage is still in progress, and will be reported in later publications.) Chapters 2-6 describe the analyses of the nine sites. Chapter 7 reports on the cross-site analyses that have been completed thus far and the shape of things to come.

Chapters 2 (on Educational Collaboratives in Massachusetts), 3 (on Regional Educational Service Agencies in West Virginia), 5 (on Educational Service Districts in Washington), and 6 (on Intermediate School Districts in Michigan) all share the same analytical structure. Chapter 4 (on Educational Service Centers in Connecticut) is a variation on the theme, because only one site is described and it was the first one I did. The chapters are arranged in order from the least intrusive state to the most intrusive state. Thus, as the chapters progress, the reader can get a sense of the impact of increasing state activity on ESA development.

Each chapter first describes the state context for the creation and evolution of ESAs. This section addresses the following questions:

- Why were ESAs created in the first place? Which groups on the educational scene shaped the initial decisions about ESA establishments?

- Did state actors decide how many ESAs should exist, where they should be located, and what they should do? If so, what factors influenced these decisions? If not, how were these decisions made? Have these decisions changed over time?

- In what ways did state legislators, the SEA, and state-wide interest groups support the fledgling ESAs? In what ways did these groups make it difficult for ESAs to thrive?

Table 2

Formal Interviews*

Sites	ESA Staff	ESA Boards	LEA Supts	LEA Staff	LEA Boards	SEA Staff	State Legislature	Others
Massachusetts						6	2	2
Urban Collab	11 (2)	6 (1)	5 (1)	3	2			
Rural Collab	5 (2)	8	4	7 (1)	3 (1)			
West Virginia						5 (1)	1	
RESA A	10	2	3 (1)	1	0			
RESA B	7	6	5	0	8			
Connecticut						4	3	1
Joint ESC	15	2	2	5	2			
Washington						15 (2)	3	
ESD West	22	3	6 (1)	7	0			
ESD East	13	4 (1)	5	3	0			
Michigan						9	3	
Arrow ISD	14 (1)	2	5	7	4 (1)			
Wilderness ISD	8 (1)	6 (2)	6	6 (1)	2 (1)			

* Numbers in parentheses represent respondents who were formerly affiliated with the group designated in the column heading. For example, of the 11 ESA staff members interviewed from the Urban Collaborative, two were no longer working at the collaborative at the time of our interview.

- Which (if any) state policy decisions created new opportunities or new barriers to ESA survival and growth?
- Did the SEA develop a consistent stance toward ESAs? Did this stance emphasize regulatory functions? technical assistance functions?

Table 3

Selected Documents and Records

Massachusetts

State Documents

Municipal Financial Data (e.g., tax rates)
Elementary and secondary school directory
SEA memoranda to superintendents
Mass SBE publication concerning collaborative projects
Reforming Special Education (Weatherley, 1979)
Special Education regulations (Chapter 766)
Dissertation on Collaboratives in MA (Demers)
Report of 'Governor's commission on school district organization and collaboration' (1974)
Commonwealth Inservice Institute grant information
Laws and regulations affecting collaboratives
Internal SEA memos and legal opinions about collaboratives
Education in the States report on Massachusetts
SBE's "Policy on Education Collaboratives"
SEA notice on collaborative board designees
Sample collaborative charter/proposal/by-laws
Directory of collaboratives
Maps
SEA advisory opinion update on collaboratives
Department of Revenue papers on taxes affecting collaboratives
MDE Per Pupil Expenditure pamphlet (1979-80)
Mass. Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC) report on collaboratives (1979)
MOEC handbook on collaborative administration
SEA organization chart

Urban Educational Collaborative Documents

Program descriptions and directory
Board minutes/agendas (1971-81)
Project budgets
Annual reports
Memoranda to LEAs
Program Advisory Committee proposal for staff and curriculum development
Agendas for conferences sponsored by the Urban Collaborative
Calendar for Professional Development Activities
Urban Coll. descriptive pamphlet of programs and services
Handbook on approaches to collaboration
Employees Manual
Articles of Organization and By-Laws
Delineation of UEC roles vis-a-vis all of its constituent LEAs
Early Urban Collaborative description/handbook/org. chart (circa 1970)
LEA financial and demographic statistics
"Urban Collaboration" (journal article written by UEC director)

Table 3 continued

Rural Collaborative documents

- LEA financial and demographic statistics
- Program descriptions
- Rural Collaborative descriptive booklet
- SEA records for the Rural Collaborative (e.g., staff, funding)
- Rural Collaborative Articles of Association
- Job descriptions for central staff
- Board of Governors directory
- Staff directory

West Virginia

State Documents

- W.V.B.E. Summary Report on all RESAs - includes program descriptions, budgets, etc. on all eight RESAs (1980)
- RESA conference on continuing education schedule
- Student Records procedures
- Laws concerning establishment of RESAs
- Staff and Board directories
- State regulations affecting RESAs

RESA A Documents

- Personnel directory (including Board members)
- Budget
- Personnel manual
- Program descriptions

RESA B Documents

- Personnel directory (including Board members)
- Budget
- Newsletters
- Conference program
- Memoranda to county superintendents
- Advisory council meeting agenda

Washington

State Documents

- State allocations, by ESD
- SBE documents concerning consolidation (minutes, plans, etc.)
- OSPI documents concerning consolidation plans
- ESDs-OSPI correspondence concerning consolidation plans (recommendations, alternative plans, etc.)
- Newspaper clippings regarding proposed consolidation (statewide)
- OSPI proposal for redistricting board member boundaries

Table 3 continued

History of ESDs in Washington (short article)
SEA organization chart/personnel listing
OSPI/ESD Annual Conference delineation of OSPI/ESD roles (1979-80)
ESD budgets (all Washington ESDs)
State laws (Title 28A RCW)
State administrative codes (WACs)
Public Education Management Survey (PEMS) - Association of Washington Business (AWB) report commissioned by OSPI in 1974
Evaluation of the PEMS recommendations that were implemented
Legislative Budget Committee preliminary audit of ESDs (1982)
List of statutory responsibilities of ESDs
Listing of services offered by various ESDs
Statewide report on cost-effectiveness of ESDs (submitted by ESDs)
Maps

ESD West Documents

Request for budget extension
Correspondence with OSPI
Organization chart
Description of programs and cooperatives
Budget (including listing of grants)
Report to Board members about budget (1982-83)
Samples of state reporting forms
Sample of program evaluation sheet for parents

ESD East Documents

Organization chart and personnel listing (includes LEA staff)
Description of programs
Budgets
Maps
Cooperative contract samples
Personnel transfer sample
LEA roster
Enrollment of LEAs in various ESD cooperatives

Michigan

State Documents

Special Education Rules (laws) (e.g., criteria, funding, etc.)
General education laws and regulations (1960 and 1976)
Education directory of Michigan schools
History of public education in Michigan
MDE forms (e.g., attendance, millages, etc) required of ISDs and LEAs by MDE
Application form for MDE grants (gifted and talented)
MACSS advisory report on consolidation (1957)
MDE report on consolidation (1980)

Table 3 continued

ISDs' funding formula and allocations (1982)
Listing of vocational educational centers and activities
MAISA report on consolidation (1967)
Michigan School Finance (Thomas) Study (1968)
Special education funding report
State Advisory Council on Voc Educ annual report (1980)
Regional Supplemental Center study (1980-81)
Michigan Educational Report (SBE newsletter)
Maps

Arrow ISD Documents

Compiled statistics on member school districts
Organization Chart
Mandates for advisory committee(s) and ISD priorities
Board minutes 1948-1982
Program descriptions (1982)
Newsletters (1981-82)
Job descriptions for senior management positions
Budgets

Wilderness ISD Documents

Vocational Training Program operating manual
Directory of local districts
Program descriptions
Western Michigan University report on ISD organization in Michigan
Board minutes (1948-1982)
Budgets
Cooperative contract samples between ISD and LEAs
Evaluation forms for ISD services
Newsletters
Youth Employment Service publications
REMC handbook and schedule
Studies of ISD priorities and local needs (1978 and 1981)
Several years of newspaper clippings

programmatic functions? Did SEA staff develop close relationships with ESA staff or did state officials keep the ESAs at arm's length?

- Did the state assume major responsibility for ESA funding through direct or indirect allocations? Did the state take steps to fund ESAs from local sources?

- In what ways (if any) do state officials rely on ESAs to contribute to state functions in elementary and secondary education? In what ways (if any) do state officials rely on ESAs to contribute to local functions?

- How do state officials monitor or evaluate ESA performance? What mechanisms are available to hold ESAs accountable to the priorities of the SEA and the legislature?

- How have changes over the years in the state context influenced the development of ESAs in the state?

After presentation of the state context, each chapter turns to analysis of the two ESAs studied in that state. The analyses of the ESAs have five parts: (1) a chronology of significant events in the history of the ESA, (2) a narrative account of the history of the ESA, (3) a description of the internal management of the ESA, (4) the relationships that the ESA maintains with the local school districts who are members or are eligible to be members, (5) the relationships that the ESA maintains with the SEA. Data provided in these analyses show the proximate context in which each ESA developed and the choices made by ESA and local leadership in response to trends in the regional and state environments. In each chapter the ESA originally selected as particularly effective is analyzed first; the ESA originally selected as less effective is analyzed second.

The ESA analyses address the following questions:

History

- What major events significantly influenced the ESA's existence? Which individuals exercised important influence over the ESA's development? Why were they able to exercise so much influence?

- What stages of development has the ESA gone through during its lifetime? Were there differences in the forces that shaped the ESA's development at the various stages? How much consensus is there about the differences in the organization over time?

- How different was the ESA five or ten years ago from its status at the time of the field work? How different was the local context five or ten years ago?

- What was the original purpose or mandate for the ESA? Has that changed over time? Why? Does the ESA have a clear sense of mission now?

- How did the ESA come to offer the mix of programs and services that it now offers?

- How have the budget and staff changed over time? What factors account for the changes? How have the organizational structure and internal management of the ESA changed? Why?

- How do ESA staff and constituents estimate the chances of continued survival and growth? What would happen to public education in the region if the ESA ceased operations?

Internal Management

- How is the ESA structured? What programs and services are offered? How are funds and staff allocated to the various ESA functions?

- How are ESA staff supervised and directed? What is the role of the senior manager(s)? the financial manager(s)? the personnel manager(s)?

Who has authority to make major program or staffing decisions? How participative is the management philosophy?

- What relationships have developed between ESA management and employees? How do these relationships support (or fail to support) ESA activities?

- How are major policy and program decisions made? Where do new programs come from? The staff? Funding agencies? Local needs? How are programs institutionalized? How does the professional staff decide where to invest scarce resources?

- How does the ESA structure affect its ability to monitor changes in state, regional, and local problems and opportunities? How flexible are administrative arrangements for ESAs to respond to changes in its environment? How are ESA activities constrained by pressures from external constituents?

- How does the ESA monitor the quality of its programs and services? What mechanisms are in place for evaluation of services to clients? How is professional staff performance assessed and improved?

Relationships with Local Education Agencies

- How does the ESA maintain its relationships with its member school districts? What mechanisms are in place for ESA staff to communicate with local superintendents, other central office staff, principals, school building staff, students, parents, school boards?

- Are there differences among member districts in the character or intensity of relationships with the ESA? What accounts for these differences? Which local districts receive more assistance, service, advice, or access to ESA resources? Which districts participate most actively in advising or governing ESA policies or in initiating contact with the ESA? Which districts resist alliance with the ESA and why?

- What formal governance arrangements permit local districts to influence ESA activities? What role does the governing board play in communicating local preferences and priorities to the ESA? What role does the governing board play in limiting or directing the entrepreneurship and ambition of ESA staff?

- How do local districts evaluate the contributes of the ESAs? Are they able to evaluate the quality of services they receive from the ESA? Are they able to procure similar services from other sources? Do they rely on the ESA for essential services or for peripheral conveniences?

- Why do local districts participate in some ESA activities? How does the ESA persuade local districts of the benefits of participation? How do local district officials perceive the benefits? What do they see as the threats or drawbacks of participation? What proposed ESA activities do they reject and for what reasons?

Relationships with the State Education Agency

- How does the ESA maintain its relationships (if any) with officials in the state education agency and the state legislature? What mechanisms are in place for ESA staff to communicate with senior officials in the SEA, program staff, legislative staff, or legislators?

- Are the relationships between the ESA and the state unique in any way that sets the ESA apart from other ESAs?

- (If these issues have not already been discussed) How does the state evaluate the contributions of this ESA? How active is the ESA in soliciting new clients or new sources of funding at the state level? How responsive is the ESA to state priorities?

Throughout these analyses, almost everything that I report is based on descriptions or explanations confirmed by more than one source. When only one source (archival or interview) provided information, I have labelled the source so that the reader may judge the trustworthiness of the report. In cases where we received conflicting accounts of the same events, I have reported the side that was supported by the preponderance of the evidence and commented on the dissenting views. If conflicting accounts could not be understood to my satisfaction, I have omitted them. Certain personal information has also been omitted at the request of some respondents if it bears only on the fate of individuals, rather than on the development of the organizations.

CHAPTER II

EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVES IN MASSACHUSETTS

This chapter examines the development and effectiveness of voluntary educational collaboratives in Massachusetts. We began our work in March 1981 with several objectives: to learn what the state education agency (SEA), the state Board of Education, and the state legislature had done and were doing to encourage or discourage the growth of collaboratives as a vehicle for the delivery of education services; to identify two collaboratives to study in depth; to use the two detailed case studies to learn how collaboratives came to be created, how the state and local school districts deal with the collaborative, and how a collaborative is able to survive and grow in a complex environment.

In 1981 there were 42 collaboratives in Massachusetts operating under certain provisions of the state education laws and officially recognized by the SEA. In addition there are some (no one is sure how many but certainly fewer than a dozen) collaboratives that are organized as private non-profit corporations and are neither recognized nor regulated by the SEA. We chose one of each to study. (Some state officials protested that the private collaboratives are not "really" collaboratives. However, as we will see, the private collaboratives have been created and have learned to survive in much the same environment as the public ones.) By our choice the two collaboratives differed not only in legal status but also in size (one very large, the other quite small) and geographic location (one urban, one rural).

A. THE STATE CONTEXT

1. Chronology of Events, Collaboratives in Massachusetts

1965

Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which for the first time provides major funding for the improvement of public education. Title III promotes innovation through funding for supplementary education centers. Groups of local school districts are encouraged to apply for planning grants.

1966

Spurred by the 1964 recommendations of a high-level commission, the State Department of Education plans a network of six regional offices. The regional education centers, as they are called, are designed to improve the SEA's ability to serve local school districts. The first center opens in Pittsfield, in the far western part of Massachusetts, in 1967.

1970

The Massachusetts legislature passes a law permitting two or more school districts to provide themselves with joint educational programs. This law, Chapter 40, Section 4E of the Massachusetts General Laws, is the first to encourage cooperation among local districts. A 1972 amendment further clarifies the legal status of cooperative programs.

1972

The Massachusetts Legislature passes Chapter 766, a sweeping special education law, requiring school districts to provide all children of school age, regardless of handicap, with an appropriate education in a public school setting if at all possible. This law contributed to the development of collaboratives by creating demand from the districts for help in serving children with low-incidence or especially severe handicaps. Local districts are given two years to plan for the implementation of the law.

1973

Gregory Anrig becomes Commissioner of Education. Early in his tenure he decides that the SEA should emphasize regional cooperation through the vehicle of the regional education centers, and that further cooperation among local districts should be strictly voluntary. As voluntary collaboratives emerge in later years, his position is that the state should play little role in encouraging or discouraging their development.

1974

The State Board of Education successfully sponsors a legislative proposal to amend Chapter 40, Section 4E to specify organizational and governance arrangements for cooperative programs. For the first time, these organizations are referred to as collaboratives. The amendment also provides for modest state funding of the start-up costs of collaboratives, but funds for this purpose are never appropriated by the Legislature. The Department of Education issues regulations to implement Chapter 766. The regulations explicitly authorize school districts to use collaboratives as a way to serve children with special needs.

1975

As Chapter 766 is implemented, over thirty collaboratives are created by local districts across the state from scratch or from existing cooperative programs. The collaborative directors form a self-help association, which they call the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC).

The U.S. Congress passes a landmark special education law, P.L. 94-142, partially modelled after Chapter 766.

Commissioner Anrig discovers that his associate commissioner for vocational education has been defrauding the state through dummy contracts and grants to consultants. The resulting scandal prompts a crackdown on the way the state awards grants and contracts and a significant tightening of procedures.

1977

The State Board of Education issues a Policy on Educational Collaboratives, to "clarify some ambiguities facing collaboratives." It emphasizes the Board's contention that collaboratives "are not governmental entities" and "are solely dependent upon their member school systems for their continued existence."

1979

MOEC responds to the Board Policy by pointing out the contradictions of state policy "which are counterproductive to locally supported collaborative efforts." The collaborative directors urge the state to clarify vexing legal problems, including such questions as whether their instructional staff are public employees with rights to collective bargaining and teachers' pension benefits, and whether collaborative are eligible for state and federal grants that normally go to local school districts. Commissioner Anrig and the SEA do not accept MOEC's recommendations. MOEC's efforts to pass legislation addressed to these questions are also unsuccessful.

1980

The Berkshire County Collaborative disbands, after years of financial troubles. The SEA takes no steps to prevent this, as the failure exemplifies the Commissioner's belief that collaboratives are temporary organizations that should survive only if their members feel they are of value.

The voters of Massachusetts overwhelmingly approve a tax limitation measure, Proposition 2 1/2, that will cut local property tax revenues and thus local school budgets by 20-25% in some districts.

The Massachusetts Teacher Retirement Board votes that certified teachers employed by collaboratives are in effect public employees and should become members of the Teacher Retirement System. This follows on the heels of an administrative decision by the Massachusetts Labor Relations Commission that collaborative staff are public employees with the right to bargain collectively.

1981

Commissioner Anrig resigns at the end of the summer. He is replaced by John Lawson, former superintendent of schools in Lexington, Massachusetts.

2. State Context

Regional collaboratives in Massachusetts are a relatively new phenomenon. Before the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) made funds available for supplementary education centers, there was nothing resembling a formal cooperative in Massachusetts. ESEA Title III money made it possible for many groups of school districts to cooperate in a formal and sustained way to develop innovative educational services. But under state law, federal funds for such purposes had to go to one of the districts acting as fiscal agent for the group. The groups had no independent legal status.

In 1970 the Massachusetts Legislature passed a law to authorize school districts to conduct joint educational programs with other school districts that would "supplement or strengthen school programs and services." (Chapter 40, Section 4E of the General Laws) This law for the first time enabled school districts to work together with shared legal and fiscal responsibility for the collaboration. The "collaborative agreement" called for by Chapter 40, Section 4E, spelled out procedures for governance and accountability that would allow school districts to enter into joint ventures. But although the 1970 law made such collaboration legally possible, few cooperating districts saw any need to establish their joint projects so formally.

The most serious push toward collaboration in the state began almost unintentionally. In 1972 Massachusetts adopted a landmark special education law, Chapter 766, that mandated all school districts to provide an adequate, appropriate, and publicly supported education to all children with special needs, to involve parents in decisions about placement in special education, and to evaluate the individual needs of each child so that all children could be placed in educational programs that actually benefit them. The requirements of the law took effect two years later, to permit local schools to plan and the State Department of Education to write implementing regulations. When the Chapter 766 regulations were issued in 1974, they spelled out the choice confronting school districts: The requirements of the law could be met by serving children within the district, serving them in private facilities, or serving them in a collaborative program, jointly with other districts. In the words of one state official, "[the regulations] were just saying, 'Hey folks. It may make sense for you to get together'. . .The regulations at that point in time weren't suggesting formal collaboratives. . .Later they sort of tightened that up. But at the time it was an acknowledgment or a vision. This is another way that makes sense. Primarily because [informal collaboration] was common practice at that time."

As districts began to implement Chapter 766, many of them found that they could not serve children with severe or multiple handicaps. Moreover the tuitions charged by private facilities were often very high. Thus the collaborative option was attractive in many cases, and most Massachusetts LEAs found themselves participating in a collaborative. Many of the brand new collaboratives were created according to the 766 regulations to help districts meet specific legal requirements for special education. Some were constituted on the legal authority of these regulations alone. Others took as their legal base a 1974 law that specified some governance arrangements for collaboratives and authorized state funding of the start-up costs for collaboratives as an incentive to school districts to collaborate. (The state funding never materialized.) Still others organized on the basis of the 1972 version of the Chapter 40, Section 4E provisions. And yet another group of collaboratives organized as private, non-profit corporations under state laws administered by the Secretary of State. By 1976 approximately 50 collaboratives of various types had been established to serve nearly all of the state's 428 school districts.

But the hodge-podge of legal forms troubled some state officials. In 1978 the State Board of Education recommended and the State Legislature adopted a law requiring all collaboratives to reorganize, if necessary, to comply with the 1974 amendments to Chapter 40, Section 4E. As of 1981, most seem to have done so, but others have not. In particular the collaboratives organized as private, non-profit corporations have not converted to Chapter 40, Section 4E status, seeing little advantage in the switch of legal status. As a result they are not officially recognized or approved by the Department of Education. According to a survey done by a collaborative director, a number of those collaboratives which are approved still have not conformed to assorted administrative and fiscal requirements. As the state has no reporting or monitoring system for collaboratives, there is no easy way for the Department to know whether collaboratives are in or out of compliance on such matters, much less to enforce these provisions.

This legal history has unfolded in a political context that strongly emphasizes the sanctity of local control of the schools and the inappropriateness of state intervention in local educational matters. Educational policy in Massachusetts has long been marked by the preeminence of local school committees and the reluctance of state officials to dictate or even appear to dictate education policy. The glaring exception to this rule has been Chapter 766, the highly prescriptive special education law. But although Chapter 766 has had profound effects on public schools, it was debated and passed as a law for the handicapped, supported by advocacy groups for the handicapped, rather than as an education law. Had its consequences for local schools and school budgets been widely understood at the time it was considered, its passage through the Legislature would have been much less likely. In any event, the dominant mode in the SEA has been to support and encourage the LEAs, not to set or enforce state priorities. As the State Board policy says:

> Collaboratives in Massachusetts are based and governed locally. Each school system which becomes party to a collaborative agreement does so on a voluntary basis and continues to maintain its local autonomy. . .The definition of collaboratives should leave no doubt that it is the local school systems which are fully responsible for the operation of their collaboratives. . .A collaborative should continue only as long as it provides efficient and effective solutions to educational problems confronting the individual school systems. In the event that a collaborative is no longer viewed as useful by its members, it should not continue.

The official policy also suggests that the reason for school districts to engage in joint efforts is cost:

> Collaboratives arose to provide local school systems with mechanisms for joint solutions to common problems, the premise being that it is less expensive to perform certain acts collectively...

However, if local districts prefer to operate in expensive isolation, the clear implication is that this is fine with the state. Like so much else in Massachusetts, collaboratives are a local matter. Here for example is the way two state officials described collaboratives:

> Collaboratives in this state are an entity of public school systems. They're not recognized in a way. I know this sounds strange but I mean they're not recognized as a separate entity. We hold school systems responsible. We don't hold collaboratives responsible. So if certain

> school systems get together and develop a collaborative, that's the way that they choose to do business.
>
> We don't want the collaboratives becoming an additional layer in terms of state government around education. . .We see the collaboratives off on the side. Their primary mission is providing support to local education agencies. The LEAs come directly to us. . . We don't want them [collaboratives] reporting to us. We want them reporting to the local school districts.

However, this laissez-faire philosophy only partially captures the reality of the relationships among local districts, collaboratives, and the state. Although the SEA has taken the position that collaboratives are a strictly local option, state officials have also seen the benefits of collaboration and in various ways have tried to encourage it. At the same time however, they have seen real dangers in the institutionalization of collaboratives and have taken other steps that have discouraged districts from participation in collaboratives. On balance, the ambivalence in the state stance toward collaboratives has probably seriously restricted the contributions of collaboratives in the State.

On the encouragement side, the SEA has taken some steps to make it easier for collaboratives to operate successfully. SEA officials and the State Board Policy on Collaboratives claim that the dominant state role has been encouragement and support. There are several pieces of evidence for this. First, the SEA supported some clarifying legislation proposed by collaborative directors to remove legal ambiguities about collaborative governance and operations. In particular the SEA supported passage of the 1974 amendments to Chapter 40, Section 4E, which called for collaboratives to appoint a treasurer, and specified that collaboratives should be governed by a board comprised of school committee members from participating school districts. The amendments also provided for an incentive grant of up to $10,000 for each school district that joins a collaborative, to cover the administrative expenses of starting a collaborative. Funds for this purpose were never appropriated, and so the incentive grants were never made. But the SEA supported the idea, and Commissioner Anrig testified in support of the incentives. Later technical amendments supported by the SEA included authorizing school committees to prepay tuition to collaboratives to ease cash flow crunches early in the school year (passed by the Legislature in 1977), explicitly granting collaboratives the right to contract for supplies and services (passed in 1978), and granting certified teachers employed by collaboratives the right to participate in the Teachers Retirement System (never passed).

Another avenue of SEA support has been financial. According to one state official:

> One can talk about being very supportive of an idea or a concept or an agency, but the proof of the pudding is in terms of your behavior, whether the collaboratives are in fact receiving funds from this agency.

Especially in the collaboratives' early years (1974-78) the support was there. Collaboratives received many grants and contracts from the SEA. This was particularly true in the area of special education. As Chapter 766 came into force in 1974, the associate commissioner for special education saw the insuperable difficulties that most LEAs faced in meeting the new mandates. In the words of one of his colleagues:

> He was very very high on collaboratives and spent a good part of his time in that area. He nurtured that whole notion because if he didn't have that, there were no other alternatives [for serving handicapped children] except private schools. . .I would say the development of collaboratives in special education was a one-man effort. If it hadn't been for him, I'm not sure what would have happened.

The support of the Division of Special Education was important in many ways. The original idea for collaboratives had come from the Chapter 766 regulations. The Division also had money from the state and later from the federal government to distribute to local districts for special education purposes. Some of this money went to collaboratives to run programs for low-incidence handicaps where few communities would have enough children with particular needs to justify creating a program in each school district. Thus collaboratives received state and federal funds to take over (from the Department of Mental Health) programs for developmentally disabled or severely retarded children and to establish public school programs to serve children with hearing or visual impairments, physical handicaps, emotional disturbances, learning disabilities, and various combinations of special needs.

A good indicator of the Division's initial support for collaboratives was the way they spent the discretionary funding they received under the federal special education law PL 94-142. In this period twenty-five percent of the state's allocation of special education money was free for the SEA to spend as it saw fit. Instead of simply turning that money over the local districts, the Division set up a system of competitive grants which collaboratives as well as local districts could compete for. In many cases, proposals from collaboratives were looked on with particular favor because collaborative programs would serve more than one district. Also, collaboratives often had the professional staff and administrative flexibility to respond to the state's requests for proposals more readily than a school district could. Thus a sizable share of the discretionary grants went to collaboratives in the mid-seventies.

Another source of encouragement was the Division's assumption of the start-up costs for the Massachusetts Organization of Educational Collaboratives (MOEC). MOEC was begun in 1975 as a self-help group of collaborative directors. As all of them were running at least one special education program, the Division of Special Education financed some of their early expenses, including the preparation of a Director's Manual and a survey of administrative and program practices in collaboratives across the state.

Both the Division's support for MOEC and the competitive grant system changed after a new associate commissioner of special education was appointed in 1977. Collaboratives got fewer opportunities to apply directly for 94-142 funds. In 1981 almost all of those funds (90%) went directly to the local districts, and much of the rest supported the Division's staff in the Department. But another avenue of Division support was still important to collaboratives. The Bureau of Institutional Schools (BIS), which serves the state's most severely handicapped children in residential facilities, does much of its business through contracts with collaboratives.

Before Chapter 766, children in institutions were the responsibility of the Department of Mental Health. But Chapter 766 required the public school system to educate all children of school age. The institutionalized children posed a special problem for the Division of Special Education. In the words of one state official:

> The law gave the State Department of Education the mandate to provide them with education. . .It was decided early on, a practice consistent within the state, to purchase the service. This agency doesn't want to be in the direct service business, because we can't do it well. . . The department actively cajoled and pursued collaboratives to develop and deliver the service, and they're damned good at it. The collaborative B.I.S. programs are among the best in the state--in fact many of them are the best in the state.

The division contracted with collaboratives to provide teachers to work with children in institutions. Collaboratives also evaluated the needs of children from their member districts residing in institutions, did individual education plans for those children, and served as liaison between the Institutional Schools and the local districts. Collaboratives were uniquely suited to fill the needs of both the Division and the local districts, neither of whom wanted to put scarce staff resources into the institutional schools. The education of these children was an early priority for the collaboratives and still accounts for a sizable share of state funding for collaboratives.

The Division of Special Education is the part of the SEA most closely associated with collaboratives. Although collaborative directors are not on the regular mailing lists of other Divisions, Special Education sends most routine communication to local special education directors and to collaborative directors. Collaborative directors are regularly invited to special education meetings, to sit on advisory councils, and to comment on proposed policy changes. Although collaborative directors have tried to get on other Department mailing lists (e.g. to superintendents), they have not been successful in gaining recognition elsewhere in the Department.

In only a few other cases has the SEA seen continued advantages to the use of collaboratives. Funds allocated by the SEA for staff development are now administered by six collaboratives, one in each region of the state. But for the most part collaboratives are ignored. A number of vocational education programs are run by collaboratives, but some of them are not officially approved and supported by the Division of Occupational Education. The state law for vocational education (Chapter 74) made no explicit mention of collaboratives until 1979, and then was amended to permit only communities that are not part of a vocational regional district to operate approved vocational programs through collaboratives. Official approval for collaborative programs has been slow in coming. One collaborative director told us about a meeting he attended at the SEA in which state officials and local superintendents discussed inter-district cooperation to offer advanced high school classes that do not attract many students, such as German, Latin, or advanced science courses. To his surprise,

> Not once during the conversation with an audience of superintendents was it mentioned that there already is an existent vehicle that you may want to talk about for this purpose--the educational collaborative.

Other state activities have limited the opportunities for collaboratives to thrive. A mild tendency to use collaboratives as a flexible administrative vehicle for accomplishing state purposes was nipped in the bud by a fraud scandal within the SEA. It was discovered that a former associate commissioner of occupational education had used several collaboratives as unwitting conduits for fraudulent grants and contracts. The scandal (in which collaboratives played a small role) brought under scrutiny the whole Department's practices for awarding grants and contracts, including those with collaboratives. Several improper practices were discovered. First, collaboratives had been used inappropriately as fiscal agents. As one state official told us:

> Collaboratives should not be used to funnel money, funnel without having any responsibility and control. . .Now I can say the collaborative had the responsibility, but real responsibility should be with the cities and towns... This department did have a relationship with collaboratives at one point when collaboratives were used as fiscal agents. That relationship no longer exists.

A second source of concern was that, according to the same official,

> There was a point when collaboratives were used as a mechanism in part to avoid state procedures. . .I remember stopping a contract here my first month where we were funding a certain collaborative to provide management training. . .and they were going to subcontract the work to someone else. . .A person was being paid at a rate higher than what the Department of Education would ordinarily pay or that the Legislature would allow the Department of Education to pay. There are state procedures for hiring consultants. . .You [can't] contract to a collaborative who then contracts out to someone else at a higher rate because the state has a limitation on consulting [fees]. That doesn't go. . .

The SEA had used collaboratives for administrative flexibility and to do the jobs that no one else wanted to do. As a result, these fledgling organizations were getting large infusions of state money. As a state administrator recalled, that made some people uneasy.

> We found ourselves doing a lot of business with collaboratives, and what was evolving was a relationship which, in our judgment, was not particularly healthy. Collaboratives, because of the funding source, were becoming very dependent on this state agency. And in terms of our philosophy, that's not where the action is... Clearly the collaboratives, in terms of this state agency, have delivered on a number of tough projects. They have, but we have to be careful.

The SEA took steps to make it harder for collaboratives to get state money directly, and to reduce instances of direct competition for funds between local districts and collaboratives. This financial withdrawal (from $10 million a year in grants and contracts to $5.7 million in 1981) has been coupled with continued ambivalence about whether collaboratives are a serious part of the public education system in Massachusetts. On one hand, state policy is to support the collaboratives. On the other hand, nobody wants to support them very much. We saw among Massachusetts bureaucrats a fear of collaboratives run amok, out of state control, out of local control. The following quotations from SEA officials illustrate:

> We don't want the collaboratives becoming an additional layer in terms of state government. . .We don't want the collaboratives someplace getting in-between, so local school districts have to deal with collaboratives and collaboratives deal with us.
>
> [Is] the information you receive from 45 collaboratives representative of the needs of a million and a half kids in this state over a number of varying program needs? The answer is it obviously won't be. That isn't to say that collaboratives can't do needs assessment better than local school districts. Generally they can. . .But there's always the danger that those 45 will not be representative of what those needs really are at the local level.
>
> [Your] assumption is that collaboratives. . .might be in a position to help us meet some of our goals. Yes. They may be. But again, that may create a problem. If you start building that little layer, it doesn't seem to me that little layer will serve either the local agencies or your own.
>
> The Commissioner has always been supportive of collaboratives. But for a number of reasons there is a sense of keeping them at arm's length.

At least some state legislators share these fears. For example, one told us:

> The legislature has been ambivalent towards collaboratives. . . a number of legislators are very concerned and sensitive to potentially creating large bureaucracies. There is an inbred legislative concern that a new idea that is designed to save money and provide better services, etc. often has the effect of creating jobs for people who are proposing the idea and developing large bureaucracies which cost money.

The state's reluctance to institutionalize the collaboratives reveals itself in many ways. For example, the Massachusetts Department of Education collects no information about collaboratives. No one knows how many children in the state are served by collaboratives, where collaboratives get their money, how many teachers work in collaboratives, or even how many school districts are not served by collaboratives. The only way anyone at the SEA knows anything about collaboratives is by looking at data from individual towns, which report on some of their individual dealings with collaboratives. MOEC has urged the SEA to collect information about collaboratives. At one point a form to do so was prepared and distributed. But, according to one associate commissioner, "the form was not authorized for release," because of the Department's policy that collaboratives should report to local school committees, not to the state.

Another example is the SEA's decision not to intervene to help collaboratives in trouble. In 1980, the Berkshire County Collaborative dissolved after a short, troubled life. The director of the regional branch office of the Department of Education watched the local districts struggle with the problems of collaboration, but regarded himself as a bystander. In his words:

> We were under a certain amount of pressure to make sure the collaborative continued. You can imagine parents were very concerned. . . But I felt and the Commissioner agreed with me that we ought to let it go. I think the Commissioner was kind of happy in that it was an example of the fact that collaboratives were not forever bound to exist. They could die out.

During the period in which we conducted interviews several other collaboratives experienced severe financial difficulties. No one in the SEA central or regional offices expressed a sense of responsibility for faltering collaboratives. One state official noted approvingly the Commissioner's view: "I don't think he's either for or against collaboratives, any more than he's for or against green chalkboards." SEA staff want to be sure that the children who were served by failing collaboratives will receive an equally appropriate education elsewhere. But they have no apparent commitment to collaboratives as an especially appropriate or desirable vehicle for providing special services to school districts.

The state has treated collaboratives in an inconsistent and confusing way. There has been genuine encouragement and support for collaboratives, particularly from the Division of Special Education. However the Department has declined many opportunities to support and/or use the collaboratives to achieve state goals. Although the Commissioner has received a number of recommendations to expand the use of collaboratives (for example, from the Governor's Commission on School District Organization and Collaboration and the Massachusetts Advisory Council on Education), most of them have been dismissed as low priority contenders for the Department's scarce resources. The Department has also resisted further clarification of the legal definition of a collaborative. One collaborative director gave us a list of some unresolved questions about collaboratives:

> May collaboratives borrow money? Who is liable for what happens in collaborative classrooms? Why are collaboratives LEAs sometimes but not others? Why should staff of a collaborative who teach next door to a first or second grade classroom not enjoy the same privileges and benefits [as that first grade teacher]?"

The Department does not want to answer such questions, does not want to feed into what one official called "the recognition factor," for fear of setting the collaboratives in concrete.

Because these questions are left open, because the Department's support is equivocal, collaborative directors are on shaky ground in many of their operations. The law says that collaboratives are voluntary; no school committee has to belong. The Department says that collaboratives are not local educational agencies. As a result the collaboratives must be entrepreneurial, must sell themselves in order to generate participation and funds. But state policies deny them many of the tools necessary to entrepreneurs. They may not seek new markets beyond their member school districts; they may not borrow or own property because school committees may not borrow or own property; they may not offer their staff many of the perquisites (notably tenure and, until 1981, a pension plan) that school committees offer their staff. These circumstances have not damped all collaborative initiative, but all the directors we spoke to felt frustrated and constrained by the mixed messages from the state.

Collaboratives in Massachusetts may have potential to improve the state and local capacity to deliver educational services. To date, they have contributed in a small, low profile way, most importantly to the delivery of services to children with low-incidence special needs. For the most part they operate outside the mainstream of educational policy and practice in the state.

B. URBAN EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

1. Chronology of Events

1967

A group of Briggs University School of Education deans and seven local superintendents agree to form an urban-suburban coalition to promote voluntary desegregation. They submit a proposal for ESEA Title III support. Two districts are urban; five are suburban. The largest suburban district, Auber, serves as fiscal agent for the group. The larger urban district, Lynwood, is the group's center of gravity.

1968

The Urban Educational Collaborative (UEC) is funded, and George Moriarty becomes the first director. A local university provides rent-free facilities. UEC begins programs to mix urban and suburban students and teachers.

1969

UEC incorporates as a private, non-profit corporation. The Board of Directors is made up of superintendents of the member districts.

UEC begins to diversify programmatically through the establishment of reading centers and staff development workshops. The voluntary desegregation programs are brought together under one director and titled the Urban Programs.

1970

Moriarty tries to broaden the membership base by inviting four of the working class suburbs of Lynwood to join UEC. The four decline to pay the $10,000 per school district membership fee.

The Lynwood Archdiocese Schools agree to participate.

1971

More programs are started. The Urban Programs continue to expand. A federally-funded work-study program offers academic credit and job training on industrial job sites. The reading centers now employ substantial staff, and they offer teacher and curriculum development in general education. Special education programs are established to advise parents, train special education teachers, and provide a forum for the seven districts to share ideas, problems and resources.

1972

Two original member LEAs drop out of UEC. There is speculation that the reason is UEC's desegregation programs; the two communities may no longer be willing to participate in voluntary integration.

UEC's bid fails to win a $1 million contract to develop a 10 year desegregation plan for the Greater Lynwood area.

A federal team makes a site visit to review UEC's application for renewed Title III funding. It finds inadequate record-keeping and a failure to define behavioral objectives. Further Title III funding is withheld pending revisions in UEC's bookkeeping system. UEC must borrow over $70,000 to meet its payroll obligations for the rest of 1972.

George Moriarty resigns in July to take a local superintendency, disappointed at the loss of the desegregation planning contract. He is replaced by Bucky Harris, who commits himself to say for a maximum of three years. Harris, an LEA superintendent from a neighboring state, takes over in November. He immediately attempts to bring UEC's accounting system into compliance with federal requirements.

1973

By March, UEC is able to repay its loans.

Harris rapidly increases UEC's budget, capturing $480,000 in grant monies in the first six months of his tenure.

New programs are begun and old ones are expanded in the special and vocational education areas.

1974

UEC's annual budget now exceeds $1 million.

Free office space at Briggs University is no longer available, and UEC moves into its own office.

Harris solicits a $75,000 grant from a local foundation to subsidize membership fees for new LEA members. As a result, four new districts -- all poorer than the suburban members of UEC -- agree to join.

1975

UEC grows. It takes over fiscal management of several small mental health programs and a program for hearing-impaired students. It begins doing evaluations of its members' students that reside in state institutions. It launches its first environmental education program. It plans an alternative high school.

After three years at the helm, Harris resigns. He is replaced by Michael Cochrane, who has experience with urban and regional planning.

1976

Cochrane reorganizes UEC programs (which now number more than 40) into four "centers": Reading and Learning, Special Education, Urban Programs and Career and Continuing Education. For the first time a central UEC budget and individual project budgets are established. Cochrane encourages the Board of Directors to become more involved in budgetary matters.

UEC increases its role in state institutions, now sending faculty into the institutions to offer instruction. These programs are funded by the State Bureau of Institutional Schools.

UEC's budget is $4 million, of which state funds make up 59%, federal funds 29%, and local funds (membership and tuition fees from member LEAs) 12%. Staff totals 200.

1977

UEC moves out of downtown Lynwood. The autonomy experienced by some projects under Cochrane's reorganization results in some directors never learning the route to the new central office.

The collaborative continues to grow, though more in programs than staff. The distinct projects now total 50, while staff growth has begun to level off. Member LEAs account for a declining share of the total budget, causing Cochrane some concern. Some member districts use UEC resources to start up their own versions of UEC programs (e.g., in the special education area), further limiting UEC's potential market.

UEC severs its legal ties to its original fiscal agent (Auker, one of the member LEAs) which had been the employer of record for some UEC staff to enable them to participate in the state teachers' retirement system.

UEC hires its first comptroller.

1978

Cochrane's early reorganization efforts prove too inflexible and divisive, without resolving his concerns about excessive autonomy in some projects. In response to complaints from staff members, he reorganizes again. He promotes one of the four center directors to associate director, implicitly demoting the other three, all of whom leave UEC in the next 18 months. He starts to promote a more collegial decision-making style among his top management team, which excludes the center directors.

A suburban school district that had left UEC in 1972 now rejoins; two new school districts join for the first time.

The seven Urban Center programs are together funded at $1 million. UEC assumes responsibility for the remains of the faltering Desegregation Project -- the one it had unsuccessfully competed for in 1972.

1979

Although the Urban Center programs continue to be successful, the rest of UEC has grown so rapidly that urban-suburban collaboration and voluntary desegregation are no longer central to UEC's purpose or image. Some of the superintendents on the governing board view this shift with great regret. A task force of the board is set up to explore new avenues for urban-suburban collaborative programming.

Environmental education and career education continue to grow, with additional state and federal funding.

Cochrane attempts to fund more programs by tuition payments from local districts, rather than from grants. He is concerned about both cash-flow and program continuity. At the end of the year, UEC eases its cash-flow problems by obtaining a loan guarantee from the Ford Foundation.

1980

UEC's articles of incorporation are amended to allow the agency to accept contracts from the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health and the Department of Education to serve institutionalized adults, as well as children. At the request of mental health officials, UEC takes over the administration of a community residence project. Adult services provide a potentially new market for UEC programming.

The passage of Proposition 2 1/2 prompts UEC's member LEAs to reexamine their involvement with UEC. Cochrane urges the Board to consider collaboration as a creative solution to their fiscal constraints.

UEC's budget now totals almost $6 million.

1981

UEC searches for new collaborative arrangements with other collaboratives, local universities, cultural organizations, and other state and local agencies, as it attempts to cope with impending reductions in federal, state and local funding. Massive teacher layoffs are announced in most of the member school districts.

An advisory committee of LEA representatives proposes that UEC facilitate cooperation on curriculum materials and development. Other plans call for a principals' center, cooperative purchasing, staff development and shared management services. If accepted, these changes would represent a move for UEC away from serving specialized populations and toward more involvement in regular education practices.

2. History

The Urban Educational Collaborative had its roots in earlier programs involving cooperation among several of the member districts. In the mid-1960's, three of the LEAs that later helped start UEC were part of a voluntary desegregation program in which black students from Lynwood attended mostly-white, suburban schools. The three districts also jointly operated a summer school. In 1967, the school superintendents of these LEAs, along with the superintendents of four other LEAs in the Lynwood area, and a group of local university administrators submitted a proposal for an ESEA Title III grant to support urban-suburban collaboration and voluntary desegregation. According to one of these superintendents, their goal was to:

> try to put together a collaborative that would have Lynwood, the archdiocese of Lynwood, and Thomas as in a sense the three urban partners, and then add to that some suburban districts who had concerns, social conscience, and also were interested in doing some educational things together.

The proposal was funded and UEC began operation in September of 1968 as a Title III project in offices provided rent-free by the Briggs University School of Education. The Lynwood, Rowe, Crowder, Thomas, Bridges, Eldon and Auker school districts were the original members. Auker served as fiscal agent and employer of record for the Title III grant. George Moriarty, formerly the director of special projects and assistant to the superintendent of a large urban district in another state, was hired as UEC's first executive director.

UEC's educational mandate was to develop programs to link the urban districts, Lynwood and Thomas, with the suburban communities. The Crowder superintendent suggested that,

> The basic thrust was to come up with some model programs on a voluntary basis that would relieve racial isolation in Lynwood.

UEC's first major project was a voluntary school desegregation effort. Moriarty worked hard to gain the support of the black community. He established contacts with other community programs. This resulted in programs for suburban middle-school students to spend one to two weeks in racially-mixed schools in Lynwood. A racially integrated summer camp led to school year programs in which students studied the impact of neighborhoods and schools on their fellow students. UEC also organized workshops that brought city and suburban teachers together to share ideas about teaching, curriculum and students. It awarded $1000 grants to teachers to develop innovative educational projects designed to improve interracial and urban-suburban understanding.

The people who were part of UEC in its early days had strong feelings about the social injustices of the times. Their interest in education went beyond the realm of reading, writing and arithmetic. Many staff members saw themselves involved in a model of constructive social change that might benefit the rest of the country. According to one:

> conservative-minded people viewed UEC with some alarm as a potential force that would break down barriers between the city and the suburbs, and they were right.

UEC's organizational atmosphere was one of freedom and chaos. One staffer recalled the situation in the first few years in vivid terms:

> No one knew what to do. People would just take off, go on vacation, do whatever.

This was consistent with the laissez-faire leadership style of George Moriarty. One UEC staffer of that time said that Moriarty, "didn't believe in time-clock people." He was anti-bureaucratic, spontaneous, charismatic and dedicated. He was fairly successful in eliciting similar dedication in his subordinates, who were strongly committed to UEC's programs. Since the number and range of programs was small, the commitment produced a sense of organizational mission among the staff. The level of informality meant that staff members often worked outside their areas of expertise and experience. One staff member described an incident in UEC's early days when she was given responsibility for a grant application when she did not know how to type and had no experience in the grantsmanship area. She says:

> we were very informal in our structure at the time. And everything that we did was by the seat of our pants. We knew nothing.

The members of the staff were excited by their projects and were willing to risk the alienation of potential clients through their aggressive approach to integration. Moriarty was high on innovation and his "somewhat lax" administrative style was supportive of new ideas for policy directions. One long-time staffer said of Moriarty, "He was the only director who was excited by innovative ideas themselves."

This level of commitment made it possible for UEC to become a going concern in the face of considerable legal and political ambiguity about the desirability of interdistrict collaboration. When UEC incorporated in 1969 as a private, nonprofit corporation with a board of directors composed of local school officials, it had only one other clear-cut legal alternative to consider. It could have remained as a federally-funded project of the Auker school district, subject to all legal constraints on the Auker school committee. Because UEC's founders sought an identity that recognized the collaborative nature of the enterprise, they wanted an organization independent of any single member district. But Massachusetts law of that time made no provision for multi-district agencies. According to the education code, local school committees and the state department of education were the only legal public education agencies in the state. (Indeed to this day education collaboratives are not legally permitted to conduct some activities reserved to local school committees.) To clarify its legal status and to free itself of certain restrictions on staffing (requiring tenure for teachers, for example) and finance, UEC became a private nonprofit corporation, surrendering its legal status as a public education agency.

Between 1969 and 1971, the collaborative began to transcend its original programmatic thrust. In 1969 it established reading centers in Lynwood and some suburbs. This was only the first step. By 1971, UEC was running a variety of programs in three different policy areas. The largest group was still the desegregation projects for teacher services, annex schools, and special education. Teacher services consisted of small grants and teacher workshop programs, a black teacher recruitment program, and an urban-suburban teacher exchange program. The Annex Schools program grew out of the early summer camp project. Urban and suburban children and staff met together at a non-school site -- the Annex School -- that was used as a base for the exploration of urban issues and problems in the Lynwood community. The special education program focused on integrating mildly retarded children into the regular program of instruction and improving programs for the mildly retarded.

UEC's second major area was occupational education. Project SPACE, which began in 1971, was the agency's initial foray into vocational training. Funded by the federal Department of Commerce and the Massachusetts Department of Education, it was an alternative form of high school education which placed students in part time jobs in local companies. They received academic instruction in the mornings and were paid to acquire work experience and training in the afternoons.

The third area was the reading and learning center (and its suburban branches) supported by ESEA Title III funds. The center provided specialized in-service training and technical advice to teachers, with a focus on the diagnosis and treatment of reading problems.

Between 1969 and 1971, Moriarty attempted -- largely unsuccessfully -- to broaden UEC's membership base by recruiting additional members. In 1970, the Lynwood archdiocese became a formal member of the collaborative. But four working-class suburbs declined to join because of UEC's high membership fee of $10,000 per LEA. While this flat rate was attractive to Lynwood because it had the largest student population and budget, it was decidedly less popular with smaller districts.

Neither incorporation nor the (unsuccessful) membership drive was able to help UEC create a secure role for itself. As the agency expanded, both in size and program diversity, its original mandate became more diffuse. One highly-placed staff member recalled the origin:

> we were a struggling agency at the time, sort of not knowing where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do and just a small group of projects.

UEC faced a number of difficult problems in 1972. Two original members of the collaborative, Rowe and Bridges, dropped out. Moriarty believed that they left UEC because they were reluctant to continue with the voluntary desegregation programs:

> Rowe school committee became very conservative, and they didn't want to mess around with Lynwood. They were worried about black kids coming out to Rowe.

This was not the worst of UEC's problems. Since its inception, UEC funds had come largely from Title III grants. In June of 1972, the federal Office of Education review team came to Lynwood to make an on-site visit. It was highly critical, and judged UEC's record-keeping inadequate. UEC's staff was shocked by the review. A staff member said:

> they brought in an on-site evaluation team that absolutely crushed us -- I mean, we were crying in the meetings.

Further Title III funding was withheld until UEC could bring its bookkeeping system up to federal standards. UEC had to borrow over $75,000 to meet its payrolls for the rest of the year. Compounding these problems was the disappointment that another agency was awarded the $1 million dollar planning grant that UEC had hoped to receive to develop a ten year desegregation plan for the Lynwood area.

For its first five years, UEC was directed by Moriarty and, to some extent, by its mission. But this mission had already begun to blur by the early 1970's. In addition to facing the dilemmas of growth, dramatic fluctuations in funding and cash flow, the politically controversial nature of desegregation, the ambivalence of the state toward collaboratives (and the concomitant legal ambiguity of UEC's position in the state educational system), and Moriarty's lack of interest in administration, UEC did not put a high priority on internal coherence. Moriarty and the staff devoted their resources toward the external, political image and capacity of the agency, and neglected fashioning a clear direction for the staff to pursue. Moriarty spent a lot of time lobbying the legislature on behalf of policy favorable to collaboratives. He attempted to build grass-roots support through the mass media. He said, "We always made sure we had newspaper support." The local districts also received a great deal of Moriarty's attention. He made extensive, if futile, attempts to build and broaden the membership among LEAs. He also worked to maintain good relations with the members. Talking about his informal relations with the Lynwood superintendent, he said:

> in between [the regular UEC Board meetings] time, I made certain I probably saw Charles Mohr [the Lynwood superintendent] about once a week. Always gave me access. That was key to the success of many things that we did.

Moriarty was correct in his perception of the importance of the external, political environment. Unfortunately, this perception was overly dominant, and other areas of leadership suffered (e.g., the internal management and the further development of the agency's role). Moriarty's style was appropriate to the period surrounding the birth of an organization like the UEC, but its further development required skills beyond the capacity of the first director. As one observer said,

> George was a dreamer, idealist. Maybe that was needed to create the kind of organization, under very ambiguous circumstances. He wasn't the best manager in the world.

George Moriarty resigned in 1972. He was disappointed at the loss of the large desegregation grant, and dismayed at the degree to which the agency had drifted from its original raison d'etre. The board replaced Moriarty with Bucky Harris, a superintendent from a bordering state. Harris was nearing retirement age and agreed to take the job for a maximum of three years. One long-time staff member suggested that he took the job to fulfill the requirements for a Massachusetts pension. Harris spent most of his time as director in pursuit of grants at the state and national level. After Moriarty's inattention to administration, the board wanted a director who would get UEC back on track while solving its fiscal problems (primarily the loss of the Title III funding). Harris' expertise in grantsmanship seemed to mean good things for the agency. The board was reacting to the legacy of Moriarty, but its solution did not prove to be stable. Over the next three years, UEC would swing from one extreme to another, this time of untrammeled expansion. Given the realities it faces, UEC is not an organization that can blossom under one dimensional leadership, as powerful as that may be, to the neglect of other critical aspects of leadership. By the end of Harris' tenure, UEC would have moved even further from the delineation of a coherent role.

Harris took immediate action to bring UEC's accounting system into compliance with federal requirements. Although UEC's programs were still running in the red, the $70,000 debt was repaid in March of 1973. Between January and May, he reported to the board, UEC had submitted half a million dollars in grant applications.

His great success in winning grants and contracts allowed existing programs to expand and new programs to be initiated. The Reading and Learning Center expanded from 5 schools to 30, and the occupational training program doubled its enrollment (to 100) for the 1973-74 school year. At about this time, the state changed its policy from making payment before services were rendered to payment six weeks after the presentation of billing. This created major cash flow problems for UEC and other state grantees. UEC became the fiscal agent for several other private programs (e.g., a program for hearing-impaired children), and offered management and administrative services to its members (and eventually non-members) in order to balance its cash flow and supplement its income with overhead fees.

During its first five years, the collaborative sustained a net loss of one member. The difficulty in expanding its membership troubled UEC's leadership for a variety of reasons. Most obviously, they desired a greater domain in which to foster educational collaboration and a larger student population to work with. But they also believed that the collaborative would have to include some of the poorer suburban communities in the area in order to acquire continued funding through state and federal grants. Only the wealthier Lynwood suburbs were members and many local people believed that UEC was not sufficiently representative of the area. Increased membership was a small, useful source of new funds from fees and tuition, but was more significant in its implications for fundraising from state and federal sources.

In 1973, UEC decided to redesign its fee schedule to make membership more desirable. The flat fee was changed to a sliding scale with a minimum of $5000 and a maximum of $10,000, depending on the size of the district. Small districts could join for half of last year's fee. In addition, fees for new members were reduced for the first two years. Harris contacted ten potential members, but the new rate structure persuaded no one to join. In March of 1974, Harris persuaded a local foundation to provide $75,000 in grants to subsidize membership fees for new members. As a result, four new districts signed on, all of them poorer than the original suburban members.

Chapter 766, which was to be fully implemented in the 1974-75 school year, had a large impact on UEC. Chapter 766 created a market for special education programs that UEC moved quickly to serve. Here again the original mission of the agency was dominated by the pursuit of a new and lucrative source of funding. UEC contracted with its school districts to provide the newly required evaluations of educational needs of the handicapped children from member districts who were in state institutions. The education of those who could not be returned to the local districts posed a sizable difficulty for the districts, for the students from any given district might be located in institutions scattered throughout the state. The director of UEC's program for hospitalized adolescents said that

> The state realized the logistical problem, hell of a problem, trying to get 350 towns to really respond to their students who were in these types of facilities.

As part of the SEA's attempt to deal with this situation, it contracted with UEC to serve institutionalized children in two regions of the state.

The population of children who required UEC's brand of special education eventually decreased as many children were taken back into local school systems. UEC's response was to increase efforts to serve children with special needs in local districts. UEC set up a committee of local special education directors who identified areas suitable for collaborative efforts. UEC then developed strategies for providing service in these areas, to be implemented by the districts or by UEC. One local special education director recalled an example of a UEC program:

> Four years ago we said we needed a pre-voc[ational] work behavior training program for mild to moderately retarded children of high school age. UEC through the use of the school systems' federal funds developed what is called Project Satellite. It's an after school program. It deals with training work behavior, skill development in food service, agricultural landscaping and woodworking.

The UEC programs started with government funds were offered to member districts for little or no charge for the life of the grant. After the grants ran out, UEC charged tuition for the services. Even the special education programs run on a tuition basis have been well-enrolled. UEC's involvement in special education increased to the point where these programs accounted for 35% of the 1981 budget.

In the midst of rapid expansion, UEC became involved in a scandal centered in the SEA. The associate commissioner of vocational education was convicted of defrauding the state by creating dummy contracts and grants. Because of Harris' eager fund raising, UEC had administered two of the projects implicated in the fraud. While UEC was never accused of any involvement in any wrongdoing, local and collaborative staff members feared their reputation would be marred because of their connection with the projects. In fact, there is no indication that UEC's image suffered lasting damage, but one staff member stated "we still are being questioned to this day on that project." The more tangible result of this episode was that the state tightened up its funding procedures and fiscal controls significantly. These have caused much annoyance for UEC staff who work with state money. UEC central staff called the new procedures "ridiculously tight" and "absurd."

There is no doubt about the entrepreneurial talents of Bucky Harris. One staffer who is still at UEC described Harris as "kind of like a laissez-faire hustler" in comparison to the present director, Cochrane. Cochrane himself stressed the context of Harris' leadership and his emphasis:

> I think his [emphasis] was pretty much appropriate to the time. He was very entrepreneurial, and at that point I think that's what was needed here. I don't think the agency would have survived without his [leadership].

Another senior administrator echoed these sentiments:

> I think at that time it was the right -- it was the right kind of directorship, with a few qualifications. There should have been some people internally who did have responsibility for paying attention to the paperwork, to the trails, to the integrity of what was being offered through these programs. But at the time, he was probably the best director that the agency could have had because -- he was a little fat man with a cigar; he used to go out and hustle bucks. And I believe when he took over the agency they were operating at a five or six hundred thousand dollar deficit, and they were in real trouble... And when he left here we had about three million dollars worth of grants, so I think he was probably the right person to be doing the political work at the time. Unfortunately there was no structure.

She went on to describe what it was like to work under Harris at UEC:

> It was a different agency, it truly was. It was not business like. My sense was that the agency was operating off of the seat of somebody's pants. [Harris] was never concerned about detail, never concerned about process, never concerned about equity, never concerned about anything... He was out hustling grants all the time...he wasn't concerned about what was happening within the agency.

Another staff member, also highly-placed, focused on staff reaction to Harris' style:

> Very interested in getting dollars into this agency, however you got those dollars. His scruples were not the same as mine. And as a staff member, I felt very uncomfortable about him -- working with him. I didn't feel that he valued staff very much... Bucky had taken us to this meeting, and they told us that this "Project Vote" had been funded. But it wasn't the project that we had written, he [Harris] had somehow used the name of it for something else, worked out some kind of a deal. We were flabbergasted, we didn't know how to respond. We hadn't been informed of it and I was sure that we were going to say something that was going to get us in trouble. But it was that kind of thing; he was a wheeler-dealer. And you never knew how he had wheeled or dealed.

During these years of grantsmanship, UEC found itself running large numbers of unconnected projects; the only common element was their financial contribution to UEC's survival in an environment fraught with uncertainty about funding, political support, legal status, and other resources necessary for survival. The lack of coherence had its side-effects:

> What happened is that I believe he caused our audiences to question us a little. And to question what our motives were, and some of that still stays.

Other staff member recalled that Harris' interaction with the UEC Board accounted for some lack of trust. Harris' priorities were kept from the Board. They had little information, and took a position of uncritical acquiescence to the consistent flow of funds.

UEC's loose organizational structure was consistent with Harris' first priority: increasing the agency's budget. The flexible environment made it easy to start new and perhaps unrelated programs and attracted professional staff who were committed to particular programs, as one staff member pointed out. The informal organizational climate created by Moriarty was perpetuated in many respects under Harris. Extensive decentralization followed from both directors' focus on external matters. Harris' orientation to funding differed from Moriarty's constituency-building, but the lack of attention to internal management was the same.

Having completed the agreed-upon three year term, Bucky Harris resigned from his position at the end of 1975. The board of directors selected Michael Cochrane as the new director of UEC, looking once again for new directions. It is no surprise, then, that Cochrane came in with the following perception of his leadership mandates:

> Management had to be rationalized. That its image had to be changed. It had a mixed image -- it had the image of getting things done. Which was good. So we wanted to maintain that side of it. I wanted to change the process by which some of them were done. I think another [mandate] was to try to establish a much better relationship with the member districts. To get that Board functioning properly, as a board... We provide much more information to the Board now on projects and budgets. When I came here, there was a one-page budget. Very, very loose.

The UEC that Cochrane inherited from Harris was quite different from the organization that Harris had taken over three years previously. UEC had experienced massive growth in its budget (from less than $1 million to $3.7 million), portfolio of programs, and staff size during Harris' tenure. UEC also possessed a decidedly different approach to its mission than it had at the outset. While many of the staff were still interested in improving social conditions, the dominant orientation was toward services to individual students and maintaining the large flow of funds that would keep the agency alive and growing. The programs designed to further school desegregation were now considered by some at UEC (and among its clientele) to be too controversial for the collaborative to expand further. UEC's new approach (it continued to develop during Cochrane's tenure) was to monitor the interests of state and federal (and to some extent, private) funding agencies so that UEC could move quickly into areas that promised substantial funding. While the services that they might provide using external grants or contracts would have to be desired by member LEAs, the focus was less on assessing the needs of member districts than on responding to opportunities presented by various funding sources, mostly at higher levels of government. While this orientation had been incipient in UEC's early days (e.g., the career education programs begun in 1971), it blossomed in the mid-1970's, especially with the expansion of funding for special and vocational education.

While UEC had grown in many ways, its administrative structure and processes had not kept pace with the rapid expansion. In his first major attempt to fulfill his perceived mandates, the new director attempted to restructure the agency into a more centralized, and thus potentially more coherent, organization. Cochrane consolidated the 40 or so programs into four administrative and programmatic centers: reading and learning, special education, urban programs, and career education, each with its own director. In addition, Cochrane put together the first agency-wide budget to coordinate the individual program budgets. To deal with the lingering association of UEC with the state fraud uncovered the year before, the director tightened up UEC accounting practices and cooperated fully with state program audits, which had become more frequent after the scandal. Also, Cochrane began to advertise the availability of major contracts nationally, rather than just locally, in an attempt to remove any doubts about the seriousness of the open-bidding process. In a further move designed to make UEC management more businesslike, a comptroller with extensive business experience was hired in 1977. On the initiative of this new employee, a computer-based financial reporting system was installed to replace the inefficient manual accounting system that had helped to turn the agency's internal affairs into an "administrative nightmare." At the same time, Cochrane began to encourage the Board's interest in budgetary matters.

As UEC undertook this initial reorganization of its management practices, it continued to grow. Building on its contracts to evaluate the educational needs of institutionalized children who were residents of member districts, the collaborative began to offer instruction in state institutions through programs funded by the Bureau of Institutional Schools.

This, and similar programs in the special education center, accounted for an increasingly large share of UEC's total revenue. At the end of Cochrane's first year at UEC, the collaborative was involved in the administration of over 50 separate projects, and the personnel force totaled more than 200. The 1976 UEC budget was just under four million dollars. Within this total, 59% of total revenue was derived from state funds, 29% from federal funds, and the remaining 12% came from collaborative members in the form of membership fees and tuition from various programs. The declining share of revenue deriving from members was a matter of concern both outside and within the agency. Although UEC was formally governed by its membership, it had become largely independent of local financial support. Many observers felt that UEC was responding more to its funding sources than to the needs of its local districts. Cochrane acknowledged this: "I think the nature of the funding situation is you do respond to external funding." Combined with the legal ambiguity of UEC's status, the funding patterns raised some doubts concerning UEC's legitimacy as a member-oriented educational collaborative.

The UEC board has functioned since the collaborative's formal incorporation in 1969 but it never developed the potential for influence that lay within its grasp. Formally it has substantial powers, including setting the policy directions that UEC pursues, approval of all new projects and budgets, control over personnel and salaries, etc. In reality, the first two directors functioned as gatekeepers and kept the board relatively distant from UEC's daily operations. The board, composed of busy superintendents and school committee members from the local districts, was too large and unwieldy to operate as a collective, and suffered yearly turnover in membership, making it still more difficult to act as a policy-making board. Cochrane involved the board as much as possible, but its value as a formal channel of communication remained negligible. The only significant area of involvement has been setting management salaries, where the board members feel confident enough of their expertise to exercise significant influence. Aside from their formal decision-making power, the board serves as an informal input mechanism -- this will be discussed below.

Cochrane's first reorganization left many problems unsolved, involving both intra- and inter-center coordination. The centers were often in competition with each other for grants or contracts. The staff's primary loyalty was still to each of their distinct programs and clients, not to the center or the agency. Budgeting took place at frequent "management team" meetings. The center directors and the accounting staff get together almost weekly. These meetings were the sole integrative mechanism across the four centers, but they were not effective because the accounting staff could not provide the necessary information. The two-person accounting staff was judged incompetent by Bucky Harris, who had informed Cochrane that these two people would have to go. Cochrane failed to implement this advice in his first reorganization. In any case, the 1978 implementation of a computer-based accounting system by the new controller eventually provided the impetus for the accounting staff's departure.

After complaints by staff, Cochrane instituted another major administrative shake-up, in hopes of solving the problems that the partial nature of his previous solution had allowed to remain. In addition to the new accounting system and a feasible budgeting process, the reorganization abolished the four centers. The special education center director was promoted to the position of associate director of UEC. Cochrane wanted to increase the agency's flexibility by freeing himself from some of the day-to-day management tasks, and he wanted to promote inter-center coordination. In her new position, the associate director assumed part of the power that had previously been wielded by the largely autonomous center directors, and thus could potentially eliminate some of the rivalry among the programs.

UEC's budget increased to $5.3 million in 1978, and three new districts became members of the collaborative. Coupled with these positive signs, however, was the fact that most of UEC's accounts receivable were more than 30 days overdue. Cash flow problems had always plagued the agency, and the risk of insolvency was exacerbated as the budget increased. Cochrane sought bank financing in order to protect UEC against temporary cash shortfalls, but without success. UEC was not a very attractive credit applicant, for its financial history was checkered and its funding was unstable. Finally in 1979, the Ford Foundation agreed to offer UEC a $100,000 loan guarantee, which made it possible for UEC to receive a substantial line of credit through a bank. This credit arrangement was renewed two years later without the support of the Ford Foundation, symbolizing the headway made by Cochrane in stabilizing UEC's fiscal status. At the start of 1981, UEC projected annual revenue of $5.85 million.

UEC's programmatic focus had changed enormously when one compares the agency in 1968 with that of 1981. Originally conceived as a medium for urban-suburban interchange of students, staff, and ideas designed to achieve some degree of voluntary school desegregation, only 8% of the organization's 1981 budget was directed specifically towards voluntary desegregation. Comparing UEC in 1981 to its early days, one staff member said:

> I think it's much more conservative. That it -- I don't think it's making any effort to really establish a metropolitan collaborative in the sense of getting kids to cross lines and teachers to cross lines.

The bulk of UEC's work was now in the areas of educating children with special needs, running youth employment and education programs, and providing indirect services in the areas of in-service teacher and curriculum development and administration/management. The collaborative still ran urban-suburban exchange programs relevant to its original mission, but these accounted for a fraction of UEC's staff and expenditures.

Troubled by this drift, some members of the board initiated a study in 1979-1980 to assess the continuing need for urban-suburban collaboration. A subcommittee of the board held hearings and meetings in most of the member districts to stimulate enthusiasm for UEC's urban programs and to explore new collaboration possibilities. But before they had time to complete their final report and recommendations, the attention of the board members was dramatically diverted away from UEC's problems and toward their own. The cause was Proposition 2 1/2, the tax limitation adopted by the voters to cap property tax rates at 2 1/2% of assessed value. Many of the UEC member districts were hard hit by the cap, facing school budget reductions of 15-30% in the 1981-82 school year. Once again, fiscal imperatives had superseded commitment to collaboration, voluntary desegregation, and overcoming institutional barriers.

The agency's future will be greatly affected by the LEA response to the passage of Proposition 2 1/2. UEC also faces the impact of the Reagan budget cuts that restrict both state and federal funding. Considering UEC's dependence on categorical federal and state grants, the successful establishment of a stable role and effective organizational processes that support it are more important now than ever before. This fiscal crisis focuses agency attention on LEA and SEA potential for support. These are the topics of our fourth and fifth sections, respectively, but we first discuss the recent internal management of the agency.

3. Internal Management

UEC began as a very small organization with an unstructured and informal atmosphere. According to Charles Gehringer, who directed the urban programs until 1980, the small size was necessary to the organization's mission. Because voluntary desegregation was so politically sensitive, UEC needed to win people over. This was best accomplished by "starting small, in order to show people that it could work," as described by Gehringer.

From the beginning the staff had a great deal of autonomy. The staff often organized around projects on an ad hoc basis. Tasks were performed by anyone who was available and willing. In our interviews, people made frequent comparisons with "a family, not a business." The director was empathetic, but it was largely up to the staff to solve their own problems. As one staff member said,

> George was very supportive, but he couldn't really help. I mean, he would say, 'Oh, I feel terrible for you' and this kind of thing.

Project managers handled the day-to-day administrative tasks:

> Each of the project directors would write their own proposal, develop their own budget, deal directly with the funding agency to negotiate, etc.

Another staff member described UEC as "a collection of free entrepreneurs." The emphasis was on staff freedom, not their entrepreneurial spirit, though they had that as well.

The loose structure and lack of centralization had its advantages and disadvantages. The major advantage was the ease with which new programs could be added and old ones dropped. Two of UEC's administrators started out as directors of independent programs funded with grant money. They threw in their lot with UEC, without fear of any loss of autonomy. When funding expired, programs disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. The loose coupling made UEC terrifically flexible.

There were, of course, obvious drawbacks. There was conflict among the staff of different projects over educational priorities and philosophies. One UEC staffer commented,

> we have enough problems with the funding agency without fighting each other. I think a certain amount of tension is good and inevitable, but it was way overboard in the past.

Lack of central administration also created inequities in personnel management and salaries. Another administrator recalled:

> [project directors] would hire people -- salaries weren't consistent between projects. They would get for their people whatever they could

> fight for, rather than saying... 'Look, all these positions are going to be doing the same thing. They should be paid the same thing.'

Because UEC was functioning as a holding company, with a number of independent ventures, many staff members felt more attached to the particular project they were working on than UEC as a whole. This was both a cause and a result of the high turnover among agency employees. The lack of staff identification with UEC spilled over to the staff of member districts. Many local school people saw only a piece of UEC and knew little about the rest of UEC's activities. Not only did this limit UEC's image, it also promoted staff commitment to specific programs (and clients), rather than to the agency as a whole.

When Bucky Harris became the director of UEC in 1972, he accepted this loose, decentralized structure as given. His strategy was to pursue funding to improve UEC's cash flow and to build the collaborative to a point where the loss of a program or two would not jeopardize its survival. Harris succeeded at this strategy, and the agency's budget expanded rapidly. However the growth in budget and programs was not matched by an increased capacity for project administration:

> there was nobody on staff here at that point to really handle this mushrooming of growth. Nobody was prepared for it. I think they had a small accounting office and people that were hired for specific project activities -- there weren't any managers that were hired to come and just manage an agency because there wasn't really any agency at that point.

Michael Cochrane arrived with a mandate and a commitment to tighten UEC's internal operations. Between 1976 and 1978 he instituted a number of organizational reforms designed to increase centralization and coordination. But the staff resented the loss of autonomy. One center director recalled the staff reaction to the initial reorganization:

> I would say there were two or three years of total craziness and then Cochrane had to dismantle some of that -- it was too expensive to keep that going and had to give people back some [autonomy] -- I mean -- they didn't give it back -- we fought our fannies off for it.

Cochrane initiated a second reorganization in 1978 to dismantle the center apparatus and increase fiscal centralization. Three of the four center directors lost power as one of them was promoted to associate director of UEC. She took over much of the day-to-day management of the agency. The new associate director was also supposed to minimize harmful intra-agency competition for grants and staff, and to decrease conflict within programs. The three center directors who had been demoted all left the collaborative within 18 months of the reorganization. One of them noted that project directors "were afraid Michael Cochrane would control them." After years of having a relatively free hand in running their programs, their autonomy was suddenly threatened. According to one of the new central staff members, the threat was significant:

> now certain things have to be cleared, now you can't do certain things on your own...we've become much more centralized, a lot more bureaucratic. I think there's some resistance to that, to picking on people who were

> here beforehand. It's hard to go from total laissez-faire to a real structure. I don't think we're totally inflexible, but we've had to impose quite a bit of structure.

The greatest change -- the most centralization -- came in the fiscal sphere. This reflected Cochrane's concerns about UEC's fiscal stability and integrity. With most of their funds coming from state and federal granting agencies, UEC was frequently audited, with serious implications for the agency. A program might be audited years after the money for that program had been spent. If UEC was found to have misused funds, it was legally responsible for reimbursement of such funds to the granting agency. With its multi-million dollar budgets, the organization was faced with the ever-present threat of having expenditures disallowed. UEC's poor capitalization, lack of credit and tight operating budgets increased the risk of this uncertainty to the survival of the agency.

Cochrane established an office of contract and grant management in 1978 as part of the reorganization in part to reduce the risk of disallowances. The director devoted her full attention to managing the nuts and bolts of UEC's crucial relationships with its funding sources. This meant substantial changes in the way program directors could operate. The contract and grant director described the message to program directors:

> look, you don't go out and you don't deal with funding agencies, the central office does; you develop what you want in your budget, but it all comes through here, and I work with you to do it.

She went on to describe the interaction with program personnel required by her job:

> I spend an awful lot of my time telling the project directors, 'It's not me telling you that you can't do this, it's because I know two or three years from now an auditor is going to come in here and they're going to say you shouldn't have done that.' So we've had to impose a lot of paperwork and a lot of red tape as really a protection and put in place controls which are essential for good accounting management, which people on the project level don't always see. They're interested in going out there and delivering services.

Cochrane also wanted other fiscal operations rationalized. For example, UEC began for the first time to investigate cooperative purchasing across programs:

> you want to buy the same thing, so let's call it the same thing, let's cost them out the same way. You can't just go out there and do it your own way, you've got to fit into our system.

Concerns about salary equity created concern about rationalizing personnel procedures within the organization. Part of the new work of the central office was to deal with the UEC salary structure. This was, to put it mildly, messy:

> There was historically a great deal of inconsistency in the programs because they all had different origins and there were different policies,

> personnel policies, that apply to some of the programs that we picked up initially that were started by other organizations and had personnel policies and commitments to their staff which we have had to adhere to over time which we couldn't match in other sources.

Although the agency's budget increased to $5.3 million in 1978, UEC was suffering from chronic cash flow problems and overdue accounts, as well as a questionable credit rating. The risk was significantly reduced through a vastly improved accounting system and the Ford Foundation's loan guarantees.

The associate director is responsible for much of the day-to-day management of the organization, including budgeting, as well as shaping the menu of programs that UEC offers. Her monthly meetings with all project directors are virtually the only contacts they have with the central office. A coordinator for program development is also an important contact for program personnel because of her unique role as instigator of new projects. According to staff members, Cochrane also encourages innovative ideas, but he doesn't have as much contact with program personnel. He used to meet regularly with a "management team" including the associate director, coordinator for program development, program controller, grant and contract officer, and all the project directors. The group proved to be too diverse and cumbersome to manage much of anything and it was discontinued. Cochrane meets only with high-level project staff on an ad hoc basis, save for a yearly weekend retreat.

Because of its complex structure and environment, UEC is not an easy place to manage. The problem is compounded by certain characteristics of the staff. Most UEC staff do not have a long-term perspective. As one self-admitted candidate for departure remarked:

> I don't think there's anybody here who views this place as permanent, from the Director right down to a program aide where we operate the programs. So it's seen as short-term as a place: get as much as you can out of this agency as far as learning within your project, other projects, etc. and then take it and capitalize on it somewhere else.

The short-term staff orientation militates against the establishment of a feasible organizational mission and the long-term strategies to accompany it. If the agency is viewed as a temporary base, individual staff members seem unlikely to extend much effort for the long term good of the agency.

High turnover -- partly a function of UEC's funding mechanisms -- also hurts the promotion of organizational loyalty. The present staff identifies with the various programs, rather than with the organization:

> If they're a teacher in a residential treatment center, they probably view themselves as working with that project director or that project. And I think that many people in the community and our public think of UEC -- there are groups that think of UEC by the project that they know well. I would say that's for sure.

The associate director stressed the same point:

> There's got to be identification with an agency... With some of our other projects there was a problem, certainly with the UP [urban programs]...As a central manager, I probably don't do enough to bring people together. We have a single event: a Christmas party.

It appears that the organization lacks integrating mechanisms. The result is a staff more concerned about day-to-day operation of individual projects than about the long-term survival of the organization.

The temporary nature of UEC's funding through grants and contracts translates into a pervasive sense of insecurity for employees. The absence of any stable, well-defined role for UEC contributes to its staff's perception of the agency as simply a short-term career opportunity.

> We get damn little security, everybody is on soft money. It disappears. But if you can't give somebody security then you have to give them some respect, freedom, opportunities for professional growth, lateral movement.

Cochrane has been honest with his employees concerning their lack of job security. One project director talked about the interplay between Cochrane's leadership style in this regard and the inherent insecurity as the impetus for an employees association:

> [Cochrane] was just getting real weird, what can I say. Everybody realized that someone could just be plucked off and be gone with no hearing, no nothing, no procedures, no mechanisms, and we just felt unnecessarily insecure.

One recent improvement in this area has been the announcement of open positions across programs, so that staffers are made aware of the opportunities offered by the organization.

> I always felt that everybody here understands soft money, nobody can give us any guarantees, but at least respect, dignity and some little signs of caring as an agency about people. Cochrane fears, and I can see that too, he can't promise people more than he can deliver, and sometimes to indicate caring might look like a promise.

The organization of UEC employees has not prospered. But it has pushed the central office to put together official personnel procedures, including standard practice for grievance handling. The announcement of openings throughout the agency is another example of responsiveness to staff preferences. As one staff member noted, conditions have improved in spite of continuing job insecurity:

> We had no means of communicating with one another, expressing issues and dissatisfactions... I would just say that things have been more open and more clear and more honest and that has felt better.

Because so much of UEC's funding is derived from grants and contracts, the collaborative has suffered a chronic scarcity of uncommitted or general operating funds and administrative staff. This dearth of uncommitted resources severely limits the ability of the agency to ponder what role might prove feasible. One staff member linked UEC's scattered sense of mission to a shortage of non-programmatic staff:

> And I think it is because in an agency like this we really don't have central staff. You know, most of the staff work -- almost 90% of the staff, 95% of the staff work on grants. They're running their projects, and what central staff we have is either so involved in the management, the day to day management with funding sources and the dollars of the grant, that it is really myself and Michael [Cochrane] that are left to sort of think about working with school districts on a more general basis. And that's a real problem for this agency, and why we'd like to be able to get funds to support these kinds of activities. It was something that we've never done well because we haven't had the manpower to work in that direction.

One disadvantage of the lack of central staff is the lack of a public relations effort. The coordinator of program development said:

> We have a very poor public relations program here. You might say that we have none. It's another one of those problems of not having central staff to assign to it, and we can only ask the project directors to do so much beyond their day-to-day activity.

The failure of UEC to publicize its activities has decreased the potential pool of UEC clients, since a school district that participates in any one program is a potential customer for other UEC projects -- if district staff are told about the range of services available.

As director, Cochrane is well aware of UEC's weaknesses. One of his reactions has been to institute an annual weekend retreat. The senior management team and the UEC board take two days when they "try to get business issues to a minimum." How much effective marketing of UEC to the board or internal strategic planning can occur in that context is questionable because of the size and diversity of the group.

Fund raising and program development have always been intimately related in UEC. Project staff members with new ideas often sought funding to support their ideas, and developed new programs with the money they raised. Efforts to control and centralize grant-seeking necessarily dampen new initiatives for program development. UEC has had to struggle toward a balance of entrepreneurship on one hand and standardization on the other hand. One staffer put this in perspective:

> You can't run an agency like that -- like an hierarchical bureaucracy. If you are going to have people hustling for bucks, you have to give them a lot of space, and they have to have a lot of autonomy over their hustling. You know, teachers don't go out and hustle for dollars to run the school system unless they have independent grants that they can control. I really felt like that when Michael Cochrane came on with this mandate for cleaning this organization up, shaping it up, that his experience has been -- some of it -- in an hierarchical school system. He felt the way to clean it up was to just shape it up this way and have this person accountable for this person and this person and to take away a lot of flexibility and stuff that were allowing some of these crazy

> things to go on. I could kind of sympathize with that, but I think it was a horrendous mistake.

Given that program personnel no longer possess complete autonomy to pursue funding, who is replacing them? The office of grant and contract management is not a suitable substitute. While purporting to handle all negotiations with funding agencies, this central office has neither the range of contacts nor the sheer person-hours that have been devoted to the pursuit of funds for new programs in the past.

The office of grants and contracts and the coordinator of program development work with project staff to develop new projects. For both of them, the availability of funds directs attention to new program ideas and is a necessary condition for acceptance of new projects. (Projects also must be approved by Cochrane and the board.) Joan White, the coordinator for program development, has developed a number of programs with Cochrane's encouragement, including a institute for in-service development. The board takes little interest in program initiation, but rarely opposes innovative proposals.

Formal measures of program effectiveness are not a major concern at UEC, although programs are evaluated in many ways crucial to the survival of the collaborative. One senior administrator described some of the mechanisms:

> Built into each program itself is whatever evaluation has been designed, either via the proposal itself and the management plan that has been designed for that, as well as any evaluation design that has been suggested or mandated by a funding source... Many of our projects have external evaluators that their funds pay for. Many of them provide their own form of evaluation through the project director.

Project directors do interim and yearly reports on all projects, but these are primarily descriptive statistics intended for board consumption. Joan White described them:

> Those are mostly the number of kids in your districts, teachers who participated and what is the dollar value to a school district, that type of thing.

The project directors also get together and exchange program information on occasion. Joan White is another important component of the evaluation process at UEC. She has some contact with agency clients, as she states:

> I'm in the school systems a lot and I hear about our projects. I hear good things, and I hear bad things. Or somebody will call me about, you know, such and such is happening, that kind of thing.

Many at UEC consider the continued existence of a program to be its evaluation. Programs that survive the market test are presumed to be the fittest. As one staff member put it:

> the real measure of evaluation is whether or not we get refunded. That's one. Whether or not school districts send their children to our programs, teachers come or not. And mostly the survival of the program, that's your best measure.

The response of other educational organizations is also considered to be a mode of evaluation. A UEC staffer referred to imitation as the sincerest form of flattery:

> We have some national demonstration models that have been very well-respected, and if they get replicated nationally, that will be another source of evaluation.

A superintendent of a member district suggested that,

> in this business, like in all businesses in all phases of education, the description of the program becomes the evaluation. You know, people describe what's going on and that becomes the evaluation. It's not just UEC, it's all of education that operates that way, unfortunately. People do not state things frequently in simple terms that are subject to examination and then examine them to see whether they are indeed as good as we say they are.

Until education approximates a science, this situation will continue. Fiscal pressure on LEAs may eventually put them in the position of critically evaluating the performance of UEC's programs, but only if they develop the staff expertise necessary to do so.

Cochrane is well aware of the agency's uncertain future and the importance of developing a justifiable, stable role for UEC in the region. He wants to redefine UEC's mission towards general education and services that would provide more permanency for the agency. Among the areas the director mentioned were cooperative purchasing, curriculum sharing, staff development and cooperative planning.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

Although UEC was created as a tool to help local school districts solve some of their own problems, the collaborative quickly developed a life of its own. Maintaining this life has been problematic. To survive and grow UEC has had to get and use support from a number of actors in its environment. A variety of federal and state agencies provide the bulk of UEC's funding, and thus have become important constituents. But UEC could continue to function without the support of these agencies. It could not continue without its local school districts. UEC staff must build and sustain productive relationships with the member school districts in order to maintain their participation and support.

Without the membership of school districts, the Urban Educational Collaborative would have nothing to collaborate. Membership in Massachusett's educational collaboratives is strictly voluntary. There are no laws that require school districts to join educational collaboratives. Not only is there no legal compulsion, but Massachusetts has a long tradition of local autonomy in education. There are strong norms against centralizing too much authority for educational matters above the local level. It is in this unsupportive context that UEC has had to convince local districts that it is in their best interests to be collaborative members.

Merely having member school districts is only a minimum requirement for UEC's existence. UEC requires operating funds in order to be more than an institutional shell. A large proportion of UEC's operating funds have come from state and federal agencies since UEC's inception in 1968. In the 1981 fiscal year UEC received 85% of its funding from these sources. About 14% of UEC's funding came from local school systems for services rendered, primarily in the form of tuition for individual students. Only 1% was derived from district membership fees.

However, the local school districts are more important to UEC than is implied by their relatively small contribution to the collaborative's funding. In order for UEC to compete successfully for most state and federal contracts and grants it must be perceived as a legitimate educational agency. UEC's legitimacy as an educational collaborative stems from the acceptance and participation it attracts from local school districts. Funding agencies would be reluctant to give money to a collaborative that was rejected by the school districts in its area. Thus, member districts have substantial, though mostly indirect, impact on UEC's ability to acquire the resources it needs to prosper.

While it is clear that UEC must obtain the support of school districts to remain a viable organization, the usefulness of UEC to school districts is less apparent. Membership in an educational collaborative such as UEC would require a reversal of the traditional attitude of proud self-sufficiency and aggressive independence that runs deep in Massachusetts school districts. In addition, active involvement in UEC poses a number of more specific problems for school districts. Four problems are most significant.

First, participating in many of UEC's programs involves logistical problems. Providing students with educational experiences outside of their usual school building may be enriching, but it is awkward to schedule. Inter-district collaboration almost always requires people, often large numbers of students, to travel between districts. This is both expensive and time consuming. The exchange of teachers involves similar problems, and usually requires extensive negotiations over such issues as timing, pay, fringe benefits, and job security.

Second, making a commitment to put students in UEC programs can leave a school district in a vulnerable position. Many of UEC's programs rely on unstable "soft money" funding which can disappear with very little notice. Such an event would leave participating school districts with the difficulty of having to step into the gap with minimal lead time. For example, it would not be easy to start up an ecology class that students were expecting to take if the anticipated UEC program was cancelled two weeks before it was to begin. Such a situation is especially dangerous if the UEC program is designed to provide educational services that are mandated by state law, which is true of many of their special education programs.

Third, while UEC might provide excellent programs, school district money spent on these programs is money that is not available for local schools. As the school age population and school budgets have declined in the 1980's, school districts have responded by reducing their staffs. With staff already being cut, in some cases supporting UEC programs would lead to firing even more local teachers. This is not easy for local school districts to swallow. As a school committee member from Eldon put it:

> school committee members are still politically accountable. They've got to get re-elected. And in a fiscally stressed declining enrollment situation you've got a staff.... Under circumstances like that to get a district to appropriate funds for farmed-out education is exceedingly difficult. The pressure is great, and understandably so, to use whatever money you can get to keep your local staff employed.

Fourth, many people have viewed UEC as an excessively liberal organization. UEC's involvement with voluntary bussing of white students into urban Lynwood created an image that has not faded. Desegregation is still a highly charged political issue for the Lynwood area. Some suburban administrators and school committees want nothing to do with an agency that might put their children in closer contact with urban blacks; avoiding this contact may have been the reason they moved to the suburbs in the first place. One of UEC's staff members stated that:

> The school systems were very uncomfortable about how their school committees viewed these white kids from the suburbs coming into the city and working with the Lynwood black kids. And it was always a very political problem and it still is.

When the Rowe and Bridges school districts dropped out of UEC in 1972 their choice was attributed to fears such as these. UEC's liberal reputation led many school administrators to distrust its teacher training programs as well.

While there are many excellent reasons for school systems to remain aloof from UEC, the collaborative has managed to attract members. In light of the disincentives, how has UEC induced school systems to become and remain active members? The reasons may be summarized in six categories.

First, UEC successfully pursues federal and state funds that individual school districts could not bring in on their own. UEC has many advantages over school systems in the competition for these resources. Some of the money is earmarked for collaborative inter-district activities that UEC is best structured to undertake. Also, UEC employs experts in proposal development and grant writing who carefully monitor the situation in funding agencies. This is rarely feasible for individual school districts. The money that UEC pulls in from federal and state sources is often used directly or indirectly to subsidize programs in local school districts. The result is that UEC can provide high quality services at a lower cost than either private providers or the districts themselves. These subsidized programs provide the school systems with an excellent return on the money they spend to enable their students to participate. A superintendent said that

> we estimate that the local membership fee that we put in of about $4,000 approximately, in direct services to children magnifies somehow out.... Our children have access to services... that are supported by $200,000 worth of money that comes in someplace, somewhere through the efforts of the staff members of UEC.

It is an attractive arrangement for many local administrators.

Second, UEC provides programs that serve students with very low incidence needs. In many school districts there are children who require, or desire, specialized educational programs. Such programs might include instruction for handicapped children, foreign languages or enriched social studies. However, there is seldom enough interest in any given district to justify hiring a qualified teacher. UEC has the capacity to reach across district boundaries to bring together students with similar needs, which makes hiring teachers to provide specialized education more efficient. In addition, UEC organized a committee of special education directors that facilitates the exchange of students between districts in order to provide the students with the most useful programs. Membership in UEC means that there is a good chance that the students who walk through the school doors each fall with unforseen instructional needs can be provided with a high quality education at a reasonable cost to the school district. Since parents of children with special needs can take legal action against school systems that fail to carry out their instructional responsibilities, UEC's ability to provide education for students with low incidence needs reduces the uncertainty faced by member districts. This is particularly true for smaller districts with less specialized curricula.

Third, UEC provides staff services and technical expertise that are not readily available to local school districts. These include grant writing, curriculum development, computer system design, and teacher training. In many school districts the need for such skills is not great enough to warrant hiring a specialist. By providing expert services for many districts, UEC can often put together enough work to justify having a specialist on the staff or on a regular consulting contract. A local superintendent tells how a UEC staff member helped his school system win a large grant for a bi-lingual education program:

> And after we got through fooling with it, the grant wasn't cleaned up right. It didn't flow right. Well UEC had a person they sent to us ... and she grabbed a hold of that. And she spent a lot of time writing, rewriting, pulling, stuffing, cutting out, throwing away. And one rainy night when it was very late I drove down to Lynwood and the post office was closed there, and this thing had to be in Washington the next morning, so I just threw it over the air mail slot on the post office, and lo and behold it got to Washington on time. And that project's worth about a half a million dollars for [our district].

UEC also makes its in-house expertise in grant administration and cash management available to districts that do not possess these skills. While UEC earns overhead fees for these services, they are offered mostly to accommodate the school districts. Cochrane suggested that the administration of some grants is not a money making venture:

> If I really analyzed it, we're probably not doing too well because you have to borrow the money before we can make the grant proposal. ...I think it does help with our relationship with our own districts and with other districts in the state to do that.

Fourth, UEC provides political benefits to people in the school systems. By running projects through UEC, superintendents can avoid having to go before their school committees to ask for money for specific projects.

Administrators with educational ideas considered radical by their school committees can use UEC as a vehicle for the implementation of politically risky programs. This allows superintendents to distance themselves from any controversy that might arise, for they can take the position that the offending program was run by UEC, in which they play only a small part. As one UEC staff member put it

> If they can't do something directly through their own school committee they can kind of participate in doing it through UEC and yet they're not - it's a decision of this agency - so they're not directly accountable for it.

The school desegregation programs are the most obvious example of this use of UEC. Another example is UEC's organization of alternate career workshops for teachers. This is an important service in an era of teacher lay-offs, but as an assistant superintendent said, "It's difficult for school systems to include within their own professional development offerings [a workshop on] alternate careers. It sends a funny message to the school committee."

Another benefit that member school systems can gain through UEC membership is the public relations value of being associated with UEC. This may be most significant for Lynwood, which has been subject to legal and political pressure to desegregate its schools. Lynwood's participation in UEC's programs may be useful in showing that some action has been taken to improve the racial mix of its schools. A superintendent from a suburban district put it this way:

> I have a sense that Lynwood's participation in UEC has helped them in a small way towards meeting the requirements.... It does provide, they can demonstrate statistically that their kids are involved with some suburban kids to some extent. ... it develops a profile for them which I guess helps them legally.

Fifth, the agency can provide administrative convenience for LEAs. UEC can provide a valuable service to school districts by handling the money for things such as conferences and workshops. This allows the district to run the programs they desire without having to turn the money over to their city treasurer, as state law would require if districts handled things like registration fees themselves.

Sixth, UEC brings together people from different districts who have common interests and concerns, but who would not ordinarily have a great deal of contact with each other. This is done through workshops, advisory groups, and UEC board meetings. Districts can learn a great deal from each other about the latest educational practices. An assistant superintendent stated that UEC put on a workshop dealing with "... competency testing that was real important for systems to attend so that they could see what each other was doing." Information about district needs and resources is also exchanged. The director of special education for the Owen school system, who chairs the special education directors' advisory group, explained that "I think we do accomplish a lot because each year we usually focus on one or two major concerns and try to resolve them. Try to bring a service about that may not have been in existence before."

UEC provides a forum not only for task-related expertise, but also for much needed affective support. School district staff often experience a great deal of job-related stress, and may have no colleagues who can provide them with a sympathetic ear. Through UEC groups they may get the social support that is lacking in their own districts. An assistant superintendent said "UEC also makes me feel like I'm not stuck in my own little sphere - that it is possible, useful and important to talk seriously with other people in my role about problems and concerns." This can be a powerful incentive for a district to become a UEC member. A UEC staff member explained the Rogelburg district's decision to join UEC as largely due to the new superintendent's desire to be in contact with her colleagues: "she's a woman superintendent, and I think she very definitely needed a support group, and was feeling very isolated and felt comfortable with this group of superintendents."

UEC attempts with mixed success to draw local districts into active collaboration by increasing their awareness of, and commitment to, UEC programs. UEC programs have received some positive publicity in the local news media, and the collaborative has become better known to LEA staff through workshops and meetings they sponsor. Much of this publicity develops around particular projects, rather than around the collaborative as a whole, which continues to suffer from low visibility. Advisory groups are useful to UEC in building support for the collaborative's programs, although local influence is usually insignificant in the UEC's decisions. The illusion of influence is attractive to LEA staff, however, and agency staff is aware of this. Said one staff member, "we really stroke them a tremendous amount...when we need a program -- we need a letter of support on a program."

The board of directors is also a useful medium for the agency to build its relationship with locals. From the viewpoint of UEC's leadership, the board offers an opportunity to gain the support of the members. Serving on the board may inculcate feelings of ownership, solidifying the board members' sense of involvement in UEC. In addition, board meetings provide the UEC director with an audience of local superintendents and school committee members that he can attempt to educate and influence. As board members have never shown a desire to encroach on the UEC director's decision-making territory, increasing their involvement poses little threat to his power, so this is a low risk strategy. UEC's board is composed of a superintendent and school committee member from each LEA. The board is the major formal mechanism that LEAs have to influence agency decision-making. The board reflects the socioeconomic and political divisions among the 14 LEAs that comprise the membership of the collaborative. The LEAs form a wide range in size, racial makeup, wealth, etc They also express a wide range of views concerning the agency and its programmatic direction. Some members are strongly committed to UEC and attend board meetings conscientiously; others fit in UEC only when they have time. Some members never show up (e.g., the Thomas superintendent).

Despite the diversity on the board, its internal decision-making is characterized as "consensual" by observers. The director says,

> This board votes almost unanimously on everything. That's the consensual style that they use. They will back away from an issue if it's divisive. There's an unwritten law.

This norm of consensus among board members is undoubtedly promoted by the uneven commitment of the members. The high turnover among the school committee representatives allows the most committed members (principally the superintendents) to lead the board toward consensus. When conflict does arise, according to one board member, it comes more often from the school committee representatives than the superintendents. The member suggested that this was because the superintendents understand the management problems facing UEC, so they are less likely to press Cochrane or to confront other board members.

The board has come to play a more visible role vis-a-vis the agency. This enhanced role has been one of Cochrane's priorities. To promote the flow of information to the board, Cochrane proposed the establishment of a budget subcommittee and a planning subcommittee. With close to 30 members, the full board is too large to work effectively at many detailed aspects of policymaking (e.g., budgeting). However, the board seldom challenges UEC's management, even with its new information and influence. One board member hinted implicitly at the high level of trust between members and the agency:

> They'll give us a list of prospective programs and the source of funding and then plans for them. And we do discuss them. We do periodically suggest certain things that interest us. We haven't taken issue with it, really, because there's been no reason to, really. They are good programs.

Despite their increasing role of late, they don't get involved with strategic or programmatic decision-making to any great extent. Members rarely disapprove UEC staff proposals. According to board members we interviewed, this occurs not only because of their high trust in UEC, but because UEC is a secondary priority for members. This situation creates enormous flexibility for the UEC staff. One central administrator noted:

> They don't want to take the time to understand the type of programs that we operate and the kinds of decisions that perhaps they could make around those programs. I'm very grateful, by the way, that they don't interfere. It would make my job more difficult if I had to worry...about the board and their input.

There are two exceptions to the general hands-off policy. The board has taken an active role in selecting directors on all three occasions, with important consequences for UEC's future directions. Second the board has often disapproved Cochrane's recommendations for staff salaries. Board members have the requisite expertise to participate as equals in this issue because of their experience with their own LEAs. But, by undercutting Cochrane's control of an important motivational device, staff salaries, they have made his job more difficult.

The level of actual participation by LEAs varies by district, according to political and economic factors. Participation is not cost-free to LEAs, and less wealthy districts may find the voluntary participation mechanisms burdensome or even alienating because of the implicit comparison with other districts. One senior employee described her experiences with a poor district, where:

> it was just very interesting to see the personalized feeling, you know, the way people felt about their school district when they couldn't bring somebody. And how uncomfortable they were that they really didn't have some tangible curriculum to put on the table versus another school district. And that's sort of -- that really is reflected in almost anything that happens in this agency. You see some aspect of that when it comes to any kind of program. The have-not and the have school districts.

Nonetheless, agency leadership makes a tremendous effort to keep in touch with LEAs and promote their involvement. The associate director scheduled the meeting of one of her three advisory groups in a particular district in order to entice staff from that LEA to become more active in the collaborative. The first director made an effort to contact a certain reluctant LEA superintendent every week in order to elicit support and involvement. While Harris largely ignored UEC's members -- he was concerned primarily with funding agencies -- Cochrane has made a concerted attempt to rebuild the relationship with his constituents. Despite all of this, the net influence of UEC's constituent members on its policy directions is limited. The members do act as direct and indirect constraints on the agency's leadership, however, and therefore retain some influence over general strategy.

In the future, the support of local districts may become even more important to the organization. The decline in federal funds and the probable decline in funding from state agencies will force UEC to look to its members for funding, more than ever before.

UEC's future course will be significantly affected by the response of LEAs to the passage of Proposition 2 1/2 by Massachusetts voters. Some see 2 1/2 as forcing LEAs to increase their participation in UEC because of the cost-efficient nature of collaborative programming. Districts on tight budgets will be pressed to cut low-priority or peripheral services. Still, recognizing the need for the services, the districts may pool whatever money they have in UEC projects. The budget crunch may also put more pressure on the school districts to pursue economies of scale through joint purchasing arrangements. The special education programs that make up the lion's share of UEC's activities may not be hurt by 2 1/2 because they are mandated by law. School districts that cut corners on such programs are almost sure to be faced with expensive legal challenges by dissatisfied parents.

A more pessimistic view of UEC's prospects in the post-2 1/2 era holds that the decline in school funds will cause LEAs to pull their money out of external arrangements for use in their own endangered programs. LEAs already express a preference for their own personnel relative to UEC staff. In this scenario, UEC programs are likely to be dropped by school districts. Proposition 2 1/2 could prove a threat to the collaborative's survival as a part of the public education system.

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

Despite the SEA's laissez faire attitude towards collaboratives, UEC began to get substantial amounts of money directly from the SEA in the early 1970's. When Chapter 766 was implemented the SEA was looking for some vehicle to provide the mandated educational evaluations for handicapped children in institutions. UEC became one of the largest contractors for these evaluations in Massachusetts.

The relationship between UEC and the Massachusetts SEA regarding project management changed quite a bit over the years. Early contractual agreements tended to be quite general and were often modified in response to what was happening in the field. This was usually, but not always, done after the SEA people responsible for program oversight had issued some form of approval. However, UEC programs were later inspected by SEA auditors, and UEC was legally obligated to repay any money that the auditors judged to have been misspent.

In the first few years of working with UEC the SEA was flexible about contract provisions. Waivers covering contract irregularities were often obtained. Reflecting on the SEA's attitude towards UEC at that time, a UEC administrator said:

> We would have [had many disallowances] if the state had not been so disorganized that it really couldn't justify adhering to an audit, because a lot of it [unauthorized expenditures] was with their sanction.

There was little coordination among the branches of the SEA that UEC dealt with:

> They would tell you to do something and what happened in the case of audits was different. The bureau comes in and they say "I don't care what the program person told you; you weren't supposed to do that."

In more recent years the SEA tightened up their procedures and became more explicit about what was allowable. In addition, the SEA "... really tightened controls on the payment side, which forces you to become more controlled yourself." The net effect was to decrease the problems between the SEA and the collaborative over program audits. One staff member noted:

> But we still get, every once in a while, some conflict, something that we were given approval for from the state, on the program side of an audit. But usually we can work around that by just getting the two parties together.

From the SEA's point of view, one of the attractive features of UEC is that it provides them with a means by which they may carry out legislated mandates and provide desired services without getting locked into commitments to more personnel:

> Very often when the state appropriates money for services they don't want to appropriate it in the form of state positions. I guess they want to give themselves the flexibility to eliminate it if they have to.

State employees acquire tenure rights that can impose constraints on the program managers' freedom to hire, fire, promote and relocate people. This difficulty is most burdensome in programs that require substantial flexibility, such as pilot projects and projects funded with soft money. UEC employees, unlike those of the state, are not protected by civil service or rigid contractual agreements and have little protection from arbitrary funding decisions.

The SEA can use UEC to handle the fiscal management of a project, which includes being the legal employer of all employees. By contracting with UEC only for accounting and general management services, the SEA can remain relatively free from commitments while still maintaining full control over the actual operation of the project. Such arrangements are attractive to UEC because they bring in money, and stabilize the collaborative's cash flow, without requiring UEC to get involved in the complexities involved in the delivery of services.

UEC's relationship with the SEA has been helped by Cochrane's role in the public education fellowship program. Cochrane does some of the SEA's in-service policy training on a consulting basis. Cochrane says of his position "... in a way I'm working with the commissioner and his deputies in grooming the potential mid-management leadership on the staff." In addition to giving Cochrane a better understanding of the internal workings of the SEA, this relationship influences the way UEC is seen by the people that Cochrane works with in the fellowship program. Major contacts with the SEA also are initiated by other senior staff. In recent years program personnel have had relatively less contact with state-level actors than they did earlier.

In the funding, policy, and legal areas, the SEA has provided more ambiguity than support. Although Cochrane feels that UEC has a good relationship with the SEA, UEC does not depend on the state for active support outside of the fiscal area, and does not receive much.

C. RURAL EDUCATIONAL COLLABORATIVE

1. Chronology of Events

1966

Several superintendents in May County decide to apply for a Title III ESEA planning grant to explore possibilities for joint programs. They receive $40,000, which they use to hire a consultant. He develops a proposal for a project called Special Education Cooperative (SECOOP). The proposal is deemed unrealistic and is not funded.

1967

The president of the local community college rewrites the proposal with the help of a local psychologist named Grace Leman. This time SECOOP is funded for $126,000 a year. Leman is hired as executive director.

The grant money arrives and SECOOP opens its doors in Maytown. In December a class for emotionally disturbed children begins. SECOOP's primary services are clinical, with an emphasis on diagnostic, evaluative, and counseling services to the 7600 elementary school children in the area.

1968

Twenty four towns, grouped into regional districts with nine superintendents, join SECOOP, paying a nominal membership fee. The town of Maytown (the largest of the 24) serves as fiscal agent for the Title III grant.

In addition to basic clinical services, Leman develops the first learning disability programs in the area. She also hires a remedial reading staff to supplement the limited staff of speech and reading specialists in the region.

1970

Leman seeks additional Title III funding as the original three-year grant runs out. Because May County is an economically depressed area, she succeeds in getting another four years of federal funding. She also cajoles the State Department of Mental Health (DMH) into assigning several staff slots to SECOOP to provide additional counseling services to the member districts.

1971

SECOOP (now called the May County Supplementary Education Center) begins a program to identify academically gifted children and to train teachers to work with the gifted.

1974

With the passage of Chapter 766 and the new law governing collaboratives, the SEA asks SECOOP to reconstitute as the Rural Educational Collaborative. Leman asks for the superintendents' cooperation in forming a governing board to be made up of one school committee member from each town.

1975

In March, the collaborative is officially created by 16 towns. By-laws are adopted by the new governing board and approved by the SEA. A search is launched for an executive director and, in spite of some superintendents' dissatisfaction with her, the Board asks Leman to continue as director. She agrees to stay for two more years.

The new board of governors votes to increase the membership fees from $2.50 per pupil to $7.50 per pupil, over the vocal opposition of the superintendents. The increase is designed to replace disappearing state and federal money.

The collaborative takes over the Developmental Day Care Center for special needs preschoolers which had been run by DMH. After the implementation of Chapter 766, DMH passed its responsibility for these children to the public schools. The collaborative runs the program on behalf of the school districts.

The May County superintendents begin meeting monthly.

1976

The Developmental Day Care Center becomes the ASE program (Alternative Special Education) in July. Leman hires a director, rents space for a classroom, and collects tuition from the districts.

The collaborative offers the following programs: diagnosis, consultation, and training; psychological treatment for children and families; ASE; coordination of programs for May County children residing in state institutions. In addition Leman attempts to fund a needs survey and planning program, which would link all human services in the county with the public schools. The program was eventually funded in late 1977.

1977

Leman resigns as director after REC has operated for two years as a collaborative. Daniel Block, a New York school superintendent, replaces her. His mandate from the superintendents and the Board of Governors is to expand the collaborative's programs beyond its clinical, special education orientation.

1978

A new preschool program is launched with federal funding, to give special needs children a chance to attend classes with non-handicapped children.

The special education directors in May County begin to meet regularly.

Block fulfills his mandate as 5 other programs begin. The collaborative assumes operating responsibility for educating children in residence at two large state hospitals and a juvenile detention center.

1979

The collaborative budget grows from $300,000 in 1977 to over a million dollars in 1979.

In June Block suffers a heart attack and is hospitalized. In his absence several members of the Board of Governors attempt to put together financial reports due at the end of the fiscal year. They are unable to reconcile various financial records. They ask Leman, who is now in private practice, to straighten out the books.

Leman and the board discover a sizable deficit and overspending. The board decides against renewing Block's contract; Block decides that he does not want to return in any case. In August, Leman becomes acting director for a few months. She cuts expenses to try to make up the deficit.

The Collaborative Alternative Program (CAP) for emotionally disturbed children, which was scheduled to begin in September, collapses as worried districts withdraw their students.

The special education directors seek a stronger role in the collaborative. With the approval of the superintendents and the school committee members of the Board of Governors, the special education directors become an advisory Board of Directors to the collaborative. They send a non-voting representative to the Board of Governors. Meanwhile, the parents of children served by the collaborative have selected their own non-voting representative to the Board of Governors.

Because of the apparent instability of the collaborative, all the member districts except Maytown give the required six month notice of their intention to withdraw from the collaborative the following June.

1980

Leman stays as acting director until February. Then an interim director (a teacher in the Maytown schools) is hired to serve out the school year. He persuades the districts to rescind their withdrawals.

Gordon Lewis, a local special education director, is appointed the new director in July. He is faced with rapid financial retrenchment as the collaborative's contracts with state institutions have expired and DMH has withdrawn funding for the slots assigned to the collaboratives in 1970.

The only districts in the county that had never belonged to the collaborative now decide to join.

The CAP program planned for the previous year gets under way in September.

The Board of Governors votes to cut membership fees from $7.50 to $4.05 per pupil.

In the wake of Proposition 2 1/2, all the districts including Maytown give six month notice of their intention to withdraw from the collaborative. Fearful of impending budget cuts, they hope to find cheaper ways to serve their special needs children.

1981

The Board of Governors comes up with a significantly lower budget and persuades the districts to rescind their withdrawals. This is accomplished by firing all the program directors and central office staff and relocating most classrooms and the collaborative headquarters into the Maytown public schools.

A new director, Paul Eads, is hired in June. He is given the title "program administrator."

The membership fee for the 1981-82 school year is reduced to $25.00 per district.

2. History

The Rural Educational Collaborative is a small collaborative, exclusively focused on special education, in a relatively poor, rural area of Massachusetts. Its 26 members include nearly all the school committees in May County, and as a result, the collaborative covers a geographical area of more than 800 square miles. The towns are tiny, so that the total school-aged population is only 10,000 children in grades K-12.

The collaborative itself is small. In school year 1980-81, it offered three direct service programs to serve almost 50 children with special needs, employed a staff of 25-30 and spent a total budget of $300,000. The plans for the school year 1981-82 included sizable reductions in staff and budget. But its size has not precluded a complicated and stormy history. The story of the Rural Educational Collaborative richly illustrates the difficulties of cooperation among school districts.

In 1966 a few of the six school superintendents in May County decided to apply for federal funds to plan for a supplementary center for the county. They received $40,000 of ESEA Title III money and hired a consultant to develop a full-scale proposal. The schools in the county had many needs and the proposal attempted to address them: curriculum development, in-service training, creative arts, athletics and recreation, and psychological/behavioral services. The proposal was rejected, as the proposed budget could not begin to cover all the things the center was supposed to do. The Title III office suggested that the proposal be rewritten, with an emphasis on the psychological services and behavioral studies.

By that time, the consultant was long gone. So the president of Maytown Community College, who was a former school superintendent, rewrote the proposal as the Title III office had suggested. One of the other superintendents asked a local school psychologist, Grace Leman, to look over the proposal and give them feedback. She helped revise the proposal once more. By the summer of 1967, it had been funded for $126,000.

The superintendents hired Leman as the director of what was known as Project SECOOP. Maytown was the fiscal agent for the project, and was technically the recipient of all funds and the employer of all the SECOOP staff. On October 15, 1967 Project SECOOP opened its doors and by December 1 Leman had started a class for severely emotionally disturbed children and set up diagnostic teams to assess the needs of elementary school and preschool-age children.

From 1967 to 1975, Project SECOOP (later the May County Supplementary Education Center) ran under Leman's leadership, with a consistent programmatic emphasis on psychological services for young children and their families. The center staff of ten or so ran classes for emotionally disturbed children, did diagnosis and therapy, worked with families of special needs children, developed a resource library of diagnostic tests, taught remedial reading, ran seminars for teachers to train them to recognize learning disabilities, did some inservice training for principals, provided support for gifted children, and worked with other community groups, such as the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and the Developmental Day Care Center run by the state Department of Mental Health. The staff was largely trained in psychology and social work. They worked only with elementary schools. In Leman's words:

> Eventually we got a lot of pressure to include adolescents. It wasn't that we didn't want to do adolescents. I was very cautious in spreading the money so thin that we would not do a very good job.

Leman placed high priority on the quality of services, and her leadership kept the staff focused on children, rather than on schools or school administrators.

> I was very conscious of the fact that although people felt they needed something, we really had to produce, really had to help kids learn. We had to help them feel better about themselves and their emotional problems.
>
> You're talking about kids' problems, and they don't just fall under education. . .The first year the emotionally disturbed class used to run three hours a day, five days a week for 11 1/2 months. We worked with all the sibs in the family and the parents on a weekly basis. It cost me $3500 a child in 1967 to do that. . .And I went down and told that to Boston; they thought I was a crazy lady.
>
> We had outside evaluators come in. I always insisted that we had people who were very experienced, who had reputations, who [would give us] something that would be very helpful to us [so that we could] change our ways if we weren't being holier than the Pope. So because of that kind of backup and our kind of attitude, and our true desire to learn to do this as well as it could be done. . ., we were always able to convince people to keep us in business.

Leman kept tight control over the fiscal and administrative side of the center: budgets, fund-raising, hiring, and liaison with the superintendents and school committees. But the staff had a lot of professional autonomy, and several of them told us about the exhilarating climate of challenge, growth, and excellence that the center provided.

The May County superintendents made up an advisory council to the center, and met intermittently with Leman. The superintendent of Maytown had the closest relationship to the center. Maytown was the fiscal agent for the original Title III grant and later grants, so the superintendent had to co-sign all Leman's payrolls and bill warrants. Maytown also had the largest student population in the county and thus had the most children using the center's services. Although none of the superintendents was involved on a day-to-day basis, all of them were generally supportive of the center's objectives.

The center continued to receive Title III money for seven years, although the original grant was supposed to last only through 1970. The federal grant was the only major source of funds for the first three years. Beginning in school year 1970-71, Leman was able to pry some funds out of the state Department of Mental Health (DMH). By pushing them to do more for children, she convinced them to assign a staff position to the center. With that salary, she hired a psychologist. Eventually, four center members were paid for with DMH salary money. About the same time, the center established membership fees for participating schools, which didn't add up to very much money to begin with, but by 1974 constituted a quarter of the center's budget. The center also received occasional state education grants, but these were not central to the center's activities.

In 1974, two critical events changed the center. First, Chapter 766 was scheduled to be implemented, requiring schools to provide for children with special needs. This forced dramatic changes in May County. As of 1968, only two of the 9 superintendents had a school psychologist, only two had a speech therapist, and only a quarter of the elementary schools had a remedial reading teacher. Even as Chapter 766 was being implemented in 1974, there were only four full-time special education administrators in the county. So the changes prompted by the new special education law altered the environment in which the May County Supplementary Education Center was operating.

Second, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a law permitting collaboratives to organize, and the Chapter 766 regulations suggested how collaboratives might be used. The state Department of Education told Leman that she should set up a collaborative if she wanted to be eligible for future funding. She and the superintendents then sought commitments from all the school committees. Almost everyone signed on, and it was agreed that the collaborative would have a Board of Governors made up of one school committee member from each participating town. In March 1975, a formal agreement was drawn up, to form the May County Educational Collaborative as of the 1975-76 school year. Leman suggested that the collaborative director's job be declared open as the collaborative would be a new entity. The superintendents stepped in to write the job description, in which the director's job was carefully distinguished from a superintendent's job. A search was conducted, and Leman was asked to take the director's job.

The transition from a Title III project under the aegis of Maytown to an independent collaborative with a lay governing board went relatively smoothly. The collaborative continued the same services to the same families and schools with the same staff. In some ways Leman's job was made a little easier:

> The school committees began to see more clearly what we were doing. It was different when I was running off to [what] felt like 20 million school committee meetings to say, "can you give us $2000 so we can do this or that for your kids?" All of a sudden the [collaborative representative] was reporting to his committee, would invite me along, but could say, "Yeah. You should see what they do down there."

But the formation of the collaborative also seems to have created new expectations and concerns in the member districts, especially among the superintendents. They saw the collaborative as an opportunity to get a broader range of services by going beyond psychological services and mental health into other areas: cooperative purchasing and transportation, service to other low-incidence populations like classes in foreign languages and advanced science for the handful of interested students in each town. They also hoped to explore other funding sources so the collaborative could pull back from DMH, as many of the superintendents were wary of the psychotherapeutic focus of the collaborative's staff.

But Leman was not enthusiastic about creating a whole new organization. She was planning to leave the collaborative at the end of the 1976-77 school year, after ten years. And she was more cautious than the superintendents about what the collaborative could do well.

> If they felt they wanted [new programs], fine, if they were willing to give me the money to hire someone to do all that. They didn't want to do that. They didn't see why, in my spare time, I couldn't quite get all those things arranged too... I didn't want to be--I did not feel the collaborative should be associated with something that was going to be less than well done.

The collaborative did take on one major new program as a result of Chapter 766. DMH had been running Developmental Day Care for severely retarded and multiply handicapped children who had never been to school. Chapter 766 required public schools to offer those children an educational program. The collaborative took over the administration of the DDC program for the 1975-76 school year, but DMH remained the fiscal agent and continued to fund it. In July 1976, the collaborative took over entire responsibility for the program, and rechristened it ASE (Alternative Special Education). Leman hired a director to shift its emphasis from custodial to educational, and, with the withdrawal of DMH funds, began to charge tuition for each child.

Two smaller programs were launched during 1976-77. The collaborative received state funds from the Bureau of Institutional schools to act as liaison between the school districts and the Institutional Schools to keep track of May County children residing in state institutions. Leman also sought a CETA grant to assess the needs of children in the county and the gaps between those needs and available services. The BIS project and the ASE program were a shift in emphasis for the collaborative. Before 1976, the collaborative had dealt with the psychological needs of children that were not well met by the schools. With ASE and BIS, the collaborative began serving children who had been excluded from schools for having less than normal intelligence. Because these children could no longer be legally excluded, the collaborative took them in as the understaffed schools in May County were ill equipped to serve them.

Leman resigned as director in June 1977 as she had planned to. Her departure demoralized the staff, who had not been prepared for the loss of the collaborative's guiding spirit. After a long search by the Board of Governors and some interested superintendents, Daniel Block, a New York school superintendent, was chosen to replace her. His mandate from the search committee and the Board was to shake up the place. In his words:

> It was a very detailed job description, clearly defined and very detailed. It specified overall supervision of all the programs that existed at that moment. It related of course to the Board of Governors. . .and to establish rapport in meeting the superintendents' needs. . .Part of the mandate called for grant writing, fund raising really, to raise funds to establish creative programs that would best meet the needs of the community. And that I looked on really as the greatest thrust, except for the direct service.

In response, he launched a flurry of grant-writing, and successful grant-writing at that. In Block's two years as director, he increased the annual budget from about $300,000 to over $1,000,000. His hope was to finance the operation of the collaborative by collecting overhead on all the grants and contracts. He brought a number of new programs to the collaborative, to serve children of member school systems and those in the surrounding area. The programmatic emphasis broadened; the clinical teams remained in place, but they were no longer the center of the collaborative's operation. Grants came in to set up an Area Service Planning Team for May County and an adjacent county area (a coordinating body to link all human service providers, including but not limited to schools, in the two counties); to support mental health services to high schools in member districts; to mount a preschool program to serve handicapped and non-handicapped children together; to send teachers into two State Hospital Schools (both located outside May County) to instruct children in residence and to facilitate deinstitutionalization; to offer special education services to children in the May County House of Correction; to expand the ASE program to include pre-vocational and vocational education for older children; and to continue liaison between BIS and the member districts; and to continue the DMH-supported clinical teams. Not only the budget but also the staff exploded during this period.

Although he was presiding over a different sort of organization, Block largely continued Leman's management style. He took primary responsibility for financial management, fund raising, and liaison with the districts, while leaving most professional, program issues to the staff. But because the collaborative was growing so rapidly, he did not have time to supervise the programs with anything like Leman's care and passion for detail. As one staff member recalled:

> He was quite supportive, not terribly well organized but very supportive. . .I was aware of some kids whose needs were not being met. . .Essentially the feeling was the there was no urgency. . .,[other] people were allegedly providing services. . .The next year after several months of meetings with a lot of people I worked out with Dan a system by which we had a teacher assistant work with these identified kids. . .Meanwhile Dan and I worked on some soft money out of the state department of ed.

Eventually he came to leave more of the financial management matters to the staff as well; both the ASE and preschool program directors began to set their own budgets, keep track of their expenditures, and approve purchases, subject to approval of the Board of Governors.

Block personally spent a lot of time working on the Area Service Planning Team. He asked the special education directors to begin meeting regularly to share ideas and information. He also worked on several other projects that for various reasons never came to fruition: two proposals for pre-school programs (which were not funded), coordination between May Community College and local high schools to provide advanced courses (some of which occurred later without the involvement of the collaborative); plans for an alternative high school (which never materialized because the districts decided to keep the money to use in their own schools); a proposal for the Thompson Center for Children and Families (which the Board of Governors refused to approve on the grounds that it would serve a neighboring county, not May County children); plans for a residential center to hold delinquent children for 30 days to 9 months while they awaited permanent placement; etc.

In 1979, towards the end of Block's second year, two disasters struck. First, the Department of Mental Health announced that it would no longer automatically fund the four staff positions it had assigned to the collaborative during Leman's time. They put out an open request for proposals to take over those positions. The collaborative was free to apply and did, but without success. The positions and the funds went elsewhere. As a result, the collaborative lost the ability to provide the most visible direct services it had provided to school buildings.

Second, in June Block suffered a heart attack. While he was in the hospital, several members of the Board attempted to manage the collaborative. They found some disarray in the financial and personnel records, and were unable to reconcile some staff activities with decisions that had been made by the Board. Block volunteered to run the collaborative from his hospital bed, but the Board refused. Instead, the Board asked Grace Leman, who was still in town, to come in for a few weeks to straighten out the books. She did, and discovered that the collaborative was in serious financial straits. There was both a cash flow problem and a sizable deficit for the fiscal year. An outside accountant came in and substantiated her conclusions.

The Board voted to appoint Leman as acting director from August to October, at which point Block might be able to come back to work. As things turned out, the Board and Block came to an agreement to part ways. Leman stayed as acting director through February. At that point the Board hired a local special education teacher to serve out the rest of the 1979-80 school year.

As a result of this turmoil, the collaborative had a very rocky year. Nearly all the grants that Block had brought in were due to expire in June 1980, and the DMH-funded positions were also scheduled to disappear. The collaborative had been ready to open an alternative program for emotionally disturbed children in September 1979. But, the districts had too little confidence in the collaborative's continued survival to commit their children and funds. The alternative program folded. Meanwhile, Leman was scrambling to make up the deficit, which required cutting staff positions. From a staff of 22 in 1977, the collaborative had grown to a staff of 90 in June 1979. By September 1980, it was back down to 30. In addition, there was substantial turnover each year, in some programs over 50%. Concerned about the viability of the collaborative, all the member school committees except Maytown gave the collaborative legal notice of their intention to withdraw from the collaborative as of June 30, 1980.

The special education directors and some of the superintendents swung into action to save the collaborative. Although there was widespread dissatisfaction with the services schools had been receiving, many of them believed the potential in the collaborative was too rich to give up. The special education directors, who had been meeting regularly, put together a proposal in November 1979. They argued that the collaborative should not be serving anyone outside May County. They suggested that the focus be exclusively special education -- no federal grants, no fancy coordinating councils, no therapy, just programs to serve school districts. In line with this, they recommended that the special education directors become more centrally involved in the governance of the collaborative, as they knew best the needs of the member districts. Finally they suggested that the collaborative be run by a "program administrator" rather than by an executive director; this change in title would signal the change in responsibilities to be restricted to programs.

After several months of discussions with Grace Leman and the superintendents (who basically supported the proposal) the Board of Governors agreed to most of the recommendations. The group of special education directors became the Board of Directors to the collaborative in June 1980, with a charge to advise the Board of Governors and the program administrator about the collaborative's programs. The Board also agreed to downgrade the director's job to that of program administrator. As they searched for a new administrator, they were looking for someone who would not be ambitious, independent, and entrepreneurial like Block. They had been burned and were determined to take a stronger hand in running the collaborative. The new title accurately reflected the lower level of responsibility and trust they were willing to give the next person in that position.

The commitment of the superintendents and the special education directors, together with the considerable lobbying efforts of Leman and the interim director, convinced the school committees to rescind their withdrawals from the collaborative. In June the collaborative was still operating at a deficit: the DMH-funded staff positions were being withdrawn; the big grants were expiring; the Area Service Planning Team moved to a state hospital in the next county; a state auditor turned up $30,000 in audit exceptions; and the member districts were asked to pay an additional assessment. However, in order to keep the school committees on board, the Board of Governors reduced the membership fees from $7.50 per student to $4.05. At the same time, the interim director had been able to resurrect the plans for an alternative program for emotionally disturbed children, and CAP (Collaborative Alternative Program) was scheduled to begin in September 1980. The nine towns in the western part of May County, which had never belonged to the collaborative, now voted to join, as a result of the revised collaborative structure, lower fees, and the arrival of a new superintendent who was enthusiastic about regional cooperation.

A permanent program administrator was hired in June. The Board had wanted the interim director to stay on, but he had commitments elsewhere. So they hired a local special education director, Gordon Lewis, to fill the position. The debate surrounding Lewis' hiring reflected in part the Board's ambivalence about whether it wanted a special education person or a manager to run the collaborative. Perhaps because one of the special education directors sat on the search committee, as did a parent representative, the search committee recommended someone with more background in special education than in management.

Lewis took over in July and set to work on two immediate tasks: reducing the deficit, and starting up the CAP program. Although there were some last minute hitches (one of the high schools retracted its offer of classroom space for the program), CAP was launched and, after a few uncertain months, settled into a high quality program. The deficit was slowly made up and the collaborative looked like it had a new lease on life. It was operating three major programs: ASE, which was by now serving 22 severely retarded children in three sites, and funded by tuitions paid by local districts; the preschool program, serving 21 children (12 of them handicapped and 9 not handicapped) in two sites, in its third year of funding from a three-year federal grant; and CAP, serving 13 emotionally disturbed children in two sites, also funded by local tuition payments.

Then disaster struck again, this time in the form of Proposition 2 1/2, a tax limitation referendum approved by the voters in November 1980. In May County the proposition had the effect of reducing school budgets that were already skimpy. The financial problems facing superintendents and and school committees were so severe that once again many questioned the wisdom of spending precious funds on the collaborative. In December all the school committees (this time including Maytown) gave notice of their intention to withdraw from the collaborative in June 1981.

Maytown's decision to withdraw was critical because it accounted for 60% of the children in collaborative programs. And as one other town official told us, "our decision. . .was basically, if Maytown stayed, we would stay. If Maytown pulled out, so would we." But Maytown was in a bind. Revenue reductions resulting from Proposition 2 1/2 required a 1981-82 budget that was 15% lower than their 1980-81 budget. And that meant the third year in a row of lower budgets. In the words of one Maytown official:

> Up until a year ago. . .I felt some real responsibility to the county. . .My feeling was that lots of program options need to be available to kids and that fewer options would have been available throughout the county had Maytown chosen not to be a member. . . I did a cost breakdown of what it was costing us to provide these services and programs through the collaborative and what we could do it for in-house. And. . .they were saying they could do it for $147,000 and I was saying I could do it for $107,000. So there was no way I could recommend that we continue with the collaborative. . .In the past I [felt] some real responsibility. But I can't do that any longer. Those times are past. And I need to now just say we can do it cheaper so we're going to do it for our kids and to hell with the other towns.

But the Board of Governors was not prepared to dissolve the collaborative if they could help it. They revised the projected 1981-82 budget, including drastic staff cuts, and after several rounds, got the budget down to where there was no cost advantage for Maytown to withdraw from the collaborative. In March 1981, Maytown then rescinded its withdrawal. As part of the budget package, the Board of Governors also slashed the membership fees from $4.05 per student to a nominal $25.00 per member district. Thus all the remaining school committees rescinded their withdrawals.

The budget negotiations were successful, but they aroused considerable dissension. Because deep cuts were possible only by firing staff, many staff members were given notice. All the program heads were told that their positions would not be continued. Several aides from each program were fired. Some of the professional support positions, like the psychologist and social worker attached to CAP, were also terminated. Staff morale throughout the collaborative plummeted. Even those not fired were getting weary of the climate of perpetual crisis.

The Board of Governors grew increasingly dissatisfied with Lewis's performance as program administrator. They saw him as a weak administrator, unwilling or unable to generate enthusiasm for the collaborative, unwilling or unable to provide vigorous leadership in the struggle to save the collaborative. His proposals to broaden the scope of collaborative activities were dismissed. His budget proposals were reworked by the finance committee. In the words of two Board members:

> I don't find anything wrong with him as a person, but as an administrator he stinks. . .He does not communicate well with the Board of Governors. He does not follow our instructions. He seems to go off on his own ways of thinking, not the board's way of thinking. . . I've been over here several times to read him the riot act but it doesn't do any good.

> I just think he is such a nice person that he didn't want to take hold of what was happening. . .I have no real idea [why], except that I know that a lot of the work that should have been done wasn't done. . .If you say you're going to do something, do it. Don't make us come back and say, "Why didn't you do it?" That's the very basics.

In May they fired him. As Lewis put it, "the main issue is that the Board wanted more control than I was able to give." A search began for a new program administrator. In July they hired another former special education administrator, this time from out of state, to replace Lewis.

The years between 1977 and 1981 were marked by constant uncertainty about the viability of a collaborative in May County. Many people in and out of the collaborative put a lot of energy into preserving the collaborative but it became increasingly difficult to see much return for their efforts. The staff turnover during this period was tremendous. As one person told us:

> The teachers and the assistants would be very open and honest and say, "Look, I don't mind working with the kids. I enjoy the kids a great deal. But I can't take the internal mechanisms of the collaborative. It's just driving me crazy, all the politics that are going on." And then they would go to grad school or go to another job.

Another staff member described the feelings of those who stayed:

> I know there was at the beginning a real fight in all of us to help the collaborative to continue. But sometimes when we looked at the budget and the realities of what staff was being paid and the things they were expected to do, often those were inhuman and outrageous proposals. And there was very little reason for us to support the continuation of the collaborative. Except it seemed to be an easier mechanism to be able to collectively serve children. I have such conflicting feelings about it. There was one time when I was really loyal, and, you know, I think the whole system let us down.

CHAPTER III

REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCIES IN WEST VIRGINIA

This chapter provides a general overview of the system of Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) in West Virginia and extended analysis of two RESAs. As has been the case in the other states we have studied, the story of the RESAs in West Virginia is tied to state politics that have shaped the system's creation and development. There has been a tension between local autonomy and state control, complicated further by varying political desires, economic realities, personalities, and geographic considerations. Together, these factors form the main story line of how the RESAs developed over the years.

A. THE STATE CONTEXT

1. Chronology of Events

1933

The West Virginia Legislature abolishes the 54 independent and 344 magisterial districts and replaces them with a system of 55 county unit school districts.

1963

The Legislature passes brief enabling legislation to allow school districts and local colleges and universities to enter into cooperative arrangements to improve the education and placement of teachers.

Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and makes Title III PACE money (i.e., Projects to Advance Creativity in Education) available to local school districts.

1966

West Virginia's first Title III-funded PACE agency is created, one of six organizations to eventually form over the next three years to serve certain areas in the state. Each receives declining federal dollar amounts to fund planning and operation. They provide diverse services, such as audio-visuals or psychological programs.

1970

Daniel Taylor becomes the State Superintendent.

1971

The legislature passes the state's first school support equalization formula package to reduce inequalities in school funding at the county level.

1972

Under the leadership of Superintendent Taylor and Governor Arch Moore, voters approve a massive Better Schools constitutional amendment that provides 200 million dollars in school construction bonding. It is the first instance of large-scale state aid to schools for construction. The total balloons to nearly 600 million dollars as local, federal vocational education, and Appalachian Regional Commission contributions come in.

The Legislature passes Senate Bill 183 that empowers the State Board of Education to create Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESAs) and to establish policies pertaining to them. In what becomes an annual appropriation, the Legislature passes a basic administrative grant to support the RESA system.

1974

The Legislature passes the Education of Exceptional Children Act which anticipates federal Public Law 94-142 the following year.

1979

Roy Truby becomes the State Superintendent.

1981

The State Senate Finance Committee recommends that the annual basic administrative grant to the RESAs be deleted. The appropriation is successfully reinstated during conference between the Senate and the House of Delegates.

The Legislature passes Senate Bill 15. Chapter 18 orders the State Board of Education to establish and adopt new standards for quality education and to require appropriate plans from county districts. In line with these responsibilities, the West Virginia SEA implements a major reorganization of its Bureau of Learning Systems along developmental and accountability lines to provide technical assistance and monitoring capabilities. This set-up replaces a structure based on instruction.

2. State Context

The RESA story begins by looking at patterns of financial support for public education that have shaped and constrained the ability of school districts to operate. In 1932, West Virginia voters approved a constitutional amendment effectively placing a ceiling on the amount of revenue available to boards of education to operate the schools. Property tax rates were limited in order to reduce the growing incidence of sale and forfeiture of property for non-payment during the Depression. The situation created by this historic action makes it impossible to ascertain a county's real wealth. By placing a ceiling on levy rates per property class, the 1932 amendment foreclosed any opportunity for a county to exceed the existing rates in order to generate additional income to run the schools. A similar limitation constrains counties from raising money to retire bonded indebtedness. As a result, major expenditures to improve public education have come about through state initiative. One former official in the SEA described the situation where:

> ...[T]hrough constitutional limitation, state code, and regulation, the counties now tax near their limits from a very small base. This makes the role of the state crucial for the schools.

In 1933, the state Legislature abolished the existing independent and magisterial school districts, replacing them with a new system of 55 county unit school districts. For the next thirty years relations between the districts and the state were often difficult and uneven. The districts were reluctant to ask for money, believing the state would attach strings. The state, for its part, was content with a structure of education that made relatively modest demands on the state treasury. AS a result, the educational system languished. There were instances of paternalism whereby some of the better off districts would look after the interests of smaller, poorer counties. Many of the latter, strapped financially and isolated by West Virginia's infamous system of roads, remained provincial in character. Physical facilities remained outdated and educational programming was limited.

Politics, economics, and personalities helped breathe new life into the system. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 substantially increased resources available to local counties. Title III PACE monies assisted in establishing a series of PACE agencies throughout the state. Funded only with federal money, they developed individual programmatic thrusts in response to unique local needs. One SEA official described the type of cooperation that led to the creation of one PACE agency in particular:

> ...[F]or example, there was a cluster of counties in the north central region [now RESA VII] that had been meeting on a regular basis, coming together monthly to discuss common problems, to conduct studies...with their own [staffs]; they didn't have paid staff to do this at all, and quite frankly, some pretty great things came out of [it]. But most of all there was a comradery...They would meet and work pretty hard for about four or five hours, and then they would have a dinner... So, in 1966 a young fellow quartered at the University suggested that he put together a PACE proposal. He did, and it took on the character of being the first so-called service agency.

In 1968, a new governor, Arch Moore, was elected. He campaigned on a platform of expanded educational expenditures, higher pay for teachers, and new school facilities to replace the counties' aging physical plants. A $200 million school building bond package was passed. It later mushroomed to nearly $600 million with the addition of contributions from the counties, federal vocational education grants, and support from the Appalachian Regional Commission. This infusion of funds, coupled with a governor interested in stimulating improvements in public education, created a great deal of activity in the state. As one observer put it, "During the period from 1965 to 1975 there was more educational initiative taking place in the state in that 10 years than had taken place in the preceding 100 years."

Daniel Taylor was hired as State Superintendent of Schools in 1970. A young man, well liked, and part of a new breed of energetic school administrators, he had been a superintendent in Wood County for four years. The early history of the RESA system owes much to his vision. For Taylor, the RESAs were only one of several things in the emerging politics of elementary and secondary education in the state. The RESA enabling legislation, submitted by the State Board of Education as a part of its regular legislative package, and subsequent state guidelines governing the RESA system, were authored by Taylor with the help of a few aides. The RESAs are largely attributable to his early judgments about what was desirable and feasible in an educational arena marked by growing demands for better services, strong norms of local autonomy, and increasing pressure from the federal sector. At the core of his view was an intense sensitivity to the dynamics of state/local relations. As two people put it:

> There was an attitude, generally around the state, that it was time for things to happen. The governor was very popular and had made commitments to education unlike any in the past. So, with [this] attitude in the capitol, and leadership by several [politicians], and the superintendent's strong presence, everyone was committed to improving and making changes.
>
> [It had to be insisted] not only on paper but in actual fact that, while the [SEA] might want to have the RESAs do certain things, they were not [to be regarded] as arms of the state. They were local entities created by [the counties] to serve local educational needs. What they did was to be locally determined... [The SEA staff had to be] continually educated and reeducated...to realize that the RESAs were not creatures of the [SEA], and the [SEA] was not routinely or in any other way to perform through RESAs to local education agencies.

Eight RESAs were formed at the local level after the West Virginia Legislature passed Senate Bill 183 in 1972. The bill stated the system was to "consolidate and more effectively administer regional educational programs" and "equalize and extend educational opportunities." The State Board of Education was empowered to establish the RESAs and have the SEA promulgate the guidelines necessary for their creation, administration, and continued operation. The Legislature voted in special session to provide basic administrative grant monies. County superintendents naturally saw incentives in the appropriation to begin the organizing process.

Senate Bill 183 had to pass through some politically sensitive filters before becoming law. However, this was not difficult and was effectively managed through the persuasive lobbying of Taylor, his close associates, and state-wide groups such as the PTA and the state superintendents' association. Taylor served as the state's point man and did all the testifying on behalf of the State Board. His strategy was to seek and secure the support of legislative leaders instead of merely relying on members of the education committees to introduce, sponsor, and guide the proposal. As one former political power at that time told us:

> [Taylor] was particularly effective in getting my support. I, in turn, worked on my associates in the House of Delegates...but this was no problem. The whole proposal went through on a voice vote, with little organized opposition.

Some limited resistance stemmed from two sources. First, the structure of the pre-existing PACE agencies and the political ambitions of two PACE agency directors rubbed some legislators the wrong way. In particular, the latter saw the directors as using their positions and agencies as bases of operation for launching political campaigns aimed at the legislators' incumbencies. Second, some legislators were concerned that RESAs were going to enlarge the state educational apparatus:

> The biggest criticism that we got in the legislature was not so much the money, it was the idea of creating another layer of the education bureaucracy, and there was an attitude that we were too damn big anyway, that we were taking about two thirds of all the money available in the state to operate the schools...a fallacy of course. But the idea that we were going to invest in the education community some authority to make them larger, go another layer...was very objectionable to some.

Somewhat surprising to some legislators was the brief opposition by the governor. In a letter to the Secretary of State, dated April 21, 1973, the governor did not elaborate on his motivations, but nevertheless stated his opposition unequivocally:

> I have eliminated [RESA] in the amount of $420,000.00...for the reason that the Regional Educational Service Agency is a new account not now needed...

Whether based on political or economic grounds, the governor's mild objections were not sustained in the House of Delegates or the Senate. One SEA official described how money was taken from comprehensive employment programs in order to underwrite the RESA administrative grants: "[I]n the wee hours of the morning some less-than-informed legislators looked at the budget and said, 'Well, looky here, the state has been giving away all this money; why don't we just take half a million and use it for the RESAs?'" Summing up the SEA's justifications for seeking a law with commensurate funding, one person had this to say:

> We had been indicating to the legislature that there were some innovative, meaningful things that were occurring out there and that they operated, of course, under the shadow of limited funding and we ought to do everything we could to continue those kinds of services. The [RESA] concept took on real character and a more discrete character than the PACE concept. Still, there was a question about legitimacy so that is why it was absolutely essential that we get legislation that...would complement what [the counties were doing already]. We needed the statutory authority to spend...money...we had no problem with [federal money], but when we started to spend state money we had to have a smooth

> flow of...authority for somebody other than a county board of education to spend the money. So, that was why the bill was drafted the way it was...

In 1979, Roy Truby replaced Daniel Taylor as the State Superintendent of Schools. There was some evidence to suggest that his arrival would change the role of the RESAs in the educational scene. Truby was the first Superintendent who was an "outsider" in that he had no prior experience in the state. The most notable change has been Truby's greater insistence that SEA officials be assigned on a more permanent basis to a RESA executive board for a specific period and attend these monthly meetings and act as conduits of information to and from the SEA. In addition, top-level staff sessions between Truby and his assistants at the SEA began to include regular discussions of the RESAs as a part of the agenda. It appears that he is moving slowly but steadily in the direction of creating a more central role for the RESAs. As one interviewee stated:

> I think that there is a more pro-RESA attitude right now... Dr. Truby comes in here and he sees the structure of the RESAs. I'm sure he had some advance knowledge of [their operation by virtue] of his other experiences. He was pretty deeply involved in the Northwest Lab...an entirely different [set-up] but a regional [concept]. I would imagine that his perceptions would be different from Dr. Taylor's. You must remember that Dr. Taylor was the guy that went across the street [to the State House] along with the others and made certain commitments, that it wasn't an arm of the [SEA], that it wasn't just another bureaucracy, and that we were not going to come over there and suddenly be doubling or tripling the requests for money.

In 1979, the State Board of Education raised questions about the operations of the RESAs, questions about what they do, what their functions are, how the agencies might be compared to one another, and why no study had been done. A report was prepared by the SEA in early 1980 -- the first report of its kind -- containing both descriptive summary statistics and reports from each of the RESA executive directors. In a sense, the content of the report was less significant than the fact it was requested in the first place.

In 1981, the Senate Finance Committee voted to eliminate the state flat grant for the entire system. There are varying interpretations of the import of this move. The most benign version locates the origin of the effort in an interpersonal incompatibility between one or two state legislators and the executive director of one of the RESAs. Another interpretation sees the vote as a harbinger of difficult times ahead for the agencies and, at a minimum, greater scrutiny by the Legislature. Regardless of the motives, the RESAs remain a peripheral part of the state education system:

> The action was a political footnote at best...RESAs being political footballs traded back and forth. The Legislature was in extraordinary session at the time, considering a state aid formula that was not to the liking of certain forces. In an effort to swap for votes the RESAs were cut...perhaps a message was sent with the clear knowledge in mind that the recommendation would be reinstituted in conference. But it was the same kind of move you see when money is voted for sewers in exchange for cutting out senior citizen centers. I must say the [SEA's] defense of

the RESAs was less than stirring, saying, in effect, that "The RESAs save the counties and the state a lot of money in the cost of gasoline."

A second move by the Legislature unfolded at the time of our visit to the state. A new bill, Senate Bill 15, was passed containing a brief section requiring that the State Board, through the SEA, enforce as well as develop new accountability plans for education: "...To require standards for educational quality and approval of county educational programs" (Senate Journal, May, 1981, p. 10). While the implications of this move for the RESAs were not known during our stay, it is possible that the RESAs will be used to a greater extent in assisting the counties in the design of accountability plans and aiding them in their implementation. As one person put it to us:

> I would prefer to see the [RESAs] more [into] identifying locally defined goals in relationship to the state-wide goals that we're trying to achieve...local control and state goals being somewhat incompatible because the local control concept permeates our education. But as the state moves to more centralized goal setting and direction, standardization, etc., the RESAs' focus would then have to change towards supporting state goals rather than just entirely [local ones]. We're under legislative mandate to develop accountability for each district in relationship to the state...so then you begin to look for a vehicle to help you and assist you to do that. And it seems appropriate that the RESAs would have that kind of capacity.

The RESA Structure

The Resolution of Establishment adopted by the West Virginia Board of Education, and written by Dr. Taylor, specifies the organizational structure of the RESAs. The Resolution accomplished two very important things. First, it established the relative independence of the RESAs from state control (despite a SEA official on each RESA's executive board) by vesting virtually all authority in the districts, thus reflecting realities of local control. Second, it defined the organizations as unambiguously under the direction of executive directors who report to their boards and no one else. In addition, the document identified areas in which the RESAs might provide services, such as administration, curriculum, media, and instruction.

As might be expected, the agencies are similar in some respects and markedly different in others -- suggesting varying instances of overlap and divergence in their developmental histories. All of them appear to have found niches which serve county-level interests reasonably well and with little fanfare. With some minor exceptions, they are not wildly divergent in terms of their budgets, the people they hire, or the primary categories of services they offer. Most are run by or are governed by people who have long associations with local county districts. The rich menus of programming found in some RESAs appear to be functions of particular local needs. None of the agencies plays a dominant role in local education, nor does any loom large in terms of time, resources, or commitment required of the members. No one could or would identify for us an example of one RESA that is clearly superior to the others across a spectrum of dimensions.

All RESAs receive an annual administrative grant from the legislative appropriation. This amount appears as a line item in the SEA's annual budget. The SEA divides the total among the eight agencies according to a formula. In essence, as one person in the SEA put it, "RESAs with members having lower assessed valuations get a weighted allocation that is proportionally more than that given to the wealthier ones. The totals come out about the same." Total appropriations from the state for FY 73-74 through FY 81-82 have varied little and have not kept up with inflation.

The RESAs get funds from other sources besides the flat administrative grant: state and federal grants, local contributions, membership fees for some sub-programs, etc. The use of market mechanisms is conspicuously absent. Total budget varies from $176,000 to $886,000; dependence on the state flat administrative grant varies from 5% to 30% of the total budget; dependence on federal grants varies from 17% to 69% of the total budget. The two RESAs with the largest total budgets also receive the largest proportions of their income from federal grants. In four instances, at least three-fourths of the total budget comes from state and local sources. These financial differences cannot be explained by differences in region size alone. While budget information was not readily forthcoming, most of our contacts at the state level did say that large RESA budgets are invariably the result of agencies successfully tapping federal programs or federal flow-through monies. RESAs with smaller budgets have been unsuccessful at grant seeking or have chosen to avoid linkages with outside sources.

The RESAs are similar in size of their memberships. The average number of districts is 6. The agencies are similar, if not identical, in their management and governance patterns. The SEA guidelines require that each agency have a county fiscal agent to receive monies, disburse funds, and oversee the agencies' accounts. The board of directors is comprised of the executive director, a chairperson, superintendents and members from local boards of education, and the SEA representative.

Data on services provided by the RESAs display real diversity. All eight offer a small set of core services, another set of elective services is provided by more than half of the agencies, and a large number of services are provided by only one or two RESAs. These data, too, suggest fundamental differences in strategies pursued by the counties.

Neither the original legislation nor the Resolution established criteria or suggested any procedures for evaluating RESA performance. The SEA's Standards for the Education of Exceptional Children (1981) make no explicit mention of the RESAs, their use by the counties in implementing special education rules and regulations, evaluation of the RESAs' participation by the counties or the SEA, or the use of the RESAs by the state as monitors of local level compliance, although the RESAs are very much involved in educating special children. The Governor's Study on School Management, submitted in January of 1974, analyzed and evaluated the business operations of each of the 55 county school systems as well as their relations with the SEA. The survey was requested by Governor Moore in light of an increase in total expenditures for elementary and secondary education in the state from $142.5 million in 1962-63 to $339.7 million in 1972-73 --an increase of 140%. In the "Forward" of the report there is a section on "regionalization" which strongly endorses a regional approach to consolidating various functional operations which were being performed independently by the 55 county districts. While the RESA legislation was new at the time of the report's issuance, the document noted their existence and suggested that they might be appropriate vehicles for accomplishing regionalization.

The timing and thrust of the Governor's report may help to explain why so little formal evaluation of RESAs has been carried out. Given the strong tradition of local autonomy in educational affairs, and given the concerns about how RESAs might impinge on this autonomy, the survey requested by the Governor may have intensified suspicions about the real intent of Senate Bill 183. Advocates of the RESA concept, especially the Superintendent, had to insure that the system would do nothing to upset the delicate arrangement between the SEA and the counties. In a sense, the report exemplifies the irony of RESAs in West Virginia. On the one hand, the report could have been used to justify a major role for RESAs in helping to streamline education service delivery. On the other hand, such a role would seriously erode the autonomy of the counties and, hence, would be politically infeasible due to the enormous power wielded by the county superintendents. Thus, the RESAs are caught in a position where it would not be in the interest of any particular RESA director to have his or her organization perform too well and become too visible.

The bright light of evaluation has fallen only indirectly on the RESA system on a few occasions. A Study of the West Virginia State Education Agency for the Public Education Study Commission of the West Virginia Legislature, pointed out that "no formal evaluation has been made by the SEA of RESA services" (p. 77). The report continues:

> Are RESAs a cost-effective approach to providing educational services? Proponents might say yes; but there is little substantive data to support the claim...the SEA has implemented its legal mandate regarding the RESAs but they lack an adequate and reliable control system to determine the RESAs' effectiveness (p. 79).

During the Taylor administration the SEA conducted no formal evaluations of RESA performance. There is some hint that the agencies began to document their activities of their own accord, but this was not formally mandated or substantiated in our visits. The SEA's strategy was centered on a modest, county-responsive, low profile role for the RESAs. Formal evaluation and scrutiny played no part in the department's designs and would have been antithetical to them.

The next two sections examine the development of two of the eight RESAs. It proved so difficult to identify successful and unsuccessful cases, that we instead selected two sites that appeared to be as different from each other as possible. We didn't succeed in getting very different sites, but then the reality of the RESA system may be that there are not significant differences among the RESAs. In any event, we call our two sites RESA A and RESA B.

B. RESA A

1. Chronology of Events

1965

Title III ESEA PACE money is made available to local county school districts.

1966

A U.S. Office of Education M-STEP Teacher Education Center (TEC) is organized in Abel County to improve and coordinate the education and placement of teachers in the region. It serves local schools and local colleges and universities.

1967

A Title III PACE agency organizes in nearby Baker. It provides services in the area of audio-visuals to local school districts. It ceases operation three years later. Some of its original personnel and equipment are later absorbed when RESA A is organized in the same vicinity.

1968

Federal funds expire and the M-STEP TEC becomes MITEC, a state and locally funded Teacher Education Center.

1972

The Legislature passes Senate Bill 183.

1973

Abel, Calhoun, Dartmouth, Fairfield and Plymouth County boards of education begin organizing RESA A (RA) and sign letters of commitment. Charles Wolf is hired as the executive director. Abel County serves as the fiscal agent. RA incorporates MITEC into its structure and allows it to keep its original board of directors as an advisory group to the RA board. General programs are offered in adult basic education, special education and cooperative public service training. The FY 1973-1974 budget is $244,000.

1974

The services of a trained psychologist are offered by RA for the first time.

1975

Robert Wilson becomes the executive director after Charles Wolf leaves to assume the Abel County superintendency during a widespread controversy over the use of certain school books. Wolf replaces a superintendent who leaves during the difficulty. A cooperative purchasing committee and a school calendar coordinating group are formed from the five county members.

1976

A first annual violin workshop and festival at a local college is presented. A major program for the gifted called Project TALENT receives Title IV-C funding.

1977

State funds for audiological services are received, as are federal monies for an adult Vietnamese education program. A Search and Serve program gets underway to locate and identify Priority I special children. RA employs 27 full-time and 24 part-time (associated with the ABE program) workers.

1978

The first annual regional science and engineering fair is held. RA employs 27 full-time and 31 part-time workers.

1979

RA has 26 full-time employees and 32 part-time.

1980

RA adds several programmatic components. A CETA Linkage agent works out of the agency with local CETA projects and the State Department of Labor. A special grant is received to fund a demonstration project for providing in-service and staff development training to teachers so that they may gain the certification required. The FY 1980-1981 budget is $746,000.

2. History

RESA A is the result of cooperative efforts of five county school districts in the central portion of West Virginia. It is not a large enterprise by standards against which many public organizations are measured. Only five districts are members and the geographic area it covers is smaller than most other RESA areas. But it enjoys a position of prominence and high visibility within the RESA system primarily because it has a large staff, high levels of funding, and a broad mix of services for school districts and surrounding communities.

Abel County is the most populated and commercially developed area in the region. The other four counties border Abel but they do not touch each other. Like spokes of a wheel, their relationship with this hub county is more than a geographic curiosity; it underscores Abel's centrality and role as leader in local education. As one person put it, "wherever you go, you start or go through Abel City."

RESA A was organized in a rather straightforward manner during the period from July, 1972 to March, 1973. The Abel County Board of Education provided the initial stimulus by responding to Senate Bill 183 and the SEA guidelines governing the RESA system. It passed a resolution in August stating the desire and intention to enter into a RESA-type arrangement. Aside from this action, however, no single individual or county dominated the organizing process. Rather, enthusiasm was shared throughout the five counties, underscoring a belief that demonstrable benefits in the form of cost reduction, greater service delivery, and enhanced educational opportunities for students and staff members would result from consolidating existing programs. One person described the attitude in the districts at that time as one which "sat well with what Dr. Taylor had in mind." As two people described for us:

> The RESA concept was not a foreign idea. I did a lot of work with the legislature then and since. The RESA never had any serious opposition. Dan [Taylor] having been a school superintendent himself, coming from the ranks, called upon all of the superintendents not only here but throughout the state... Then again, you'll always have a few politicians in opposition. But the [SEA] and a couple of state-wide organizations were very much behind this thing.
>
> It was clear to all of us that this arrangement would give us more formal and systematic ways of dealing with each other.

The Fairfield County Board of Education passed its resolution in early September. An organizing meeting was soon held and attended by the five superintendents. They decided to request, by letter to Dr. Taylor, the assistance of an assistant superintendent from the SEA to answer minor questions surrounding the financial and organizational aspects of the RESA proposal. While these were "get-togethers so the superintendents could explore what could be done," the substance of the meetings "followed pretty much what had been designated in the [SEA] guidelines."

The assistance was readily forthcoming. The Calhoun County Board of Education passed its resolution in late September. Not until February, 1973 was another meeting held, at which time an assistant superintendent from Abel County, named Charles Wolf, was selected as acting executive director of the new venture at no salary -- despite his efforts to get other people to accept the post. Shortly thereafter the Dartmouth and Plymouth County Boards of Education passed resolutions. In late February Charles Wolf wrote a letter to Dr. Taylor requesting his approval of the new organization. This came in March and RESA A was born. A permanent representative was chosen by the SEA to sit on the RESA A executive board comprised of Wolf, the county superintendents, and one person from each of the local boards of education. Wolf became the full-time director, with pay, in September.

The organizing process was a simple one. There was no opposition in the local boards. The resolutions were passed without extended discussion or debate. RESA A was not viewed as a threat nor an imposition from the SEA. Its financial and organizational aspects were carefully spelled out in SEA guidelines that reflected the realities of local control. The SEA representative was helpful in his interpretation. Finally, the counties knew that financial support would be forthcoming in the form of yearly administrative grants from the SEA.

The superintendents did not have extensive plans or elaborate expectations of what RESA A would be. This effectively foreclosed any pressure on Wolf to develop a complicated, far-reaching enterprise:

> There were on-going projects, projects without a head, if you will. So we brought these into being together in this building... It was not hard to do.

Also, RESA A was seen as a convenient means to capture and consolidate federal and state grants, develop new services as money became available, and spread existing services to meet regional needs. A most salient consideration at that time was to streamline many decision-making and policy formation responsibilities of the superintendents. One person described the scope and flavor of this objective in the following manner:

> Money was not the major factor, but cooperation was. We wanted a smooth operating organization. We didn't have any big plans, just helping the students and keeping the administrators from having so many meetings. You could have everything on one agenda narrowed down to one meeting.

The superintendents were pleased with the way RESA A clarified the ambiguities of inter-district cooperation. Existing laws and state regulations never explicitly addressed these issues by either sanctioning or prohibiting cooperation at the local level. As a result the districts developed a history of informal collaboration, "swapping, bargaining, and the like." "We never worried about what we wanted to do, but how it could be done and legally." RESA A answered the questions about legality but did not impose contractual arrangements between the districts.

It also required very little in the way of start-up costs. Abel County provided a rent-free facility next door to its own administrative headquarters. RESA A has been there ever since. Centrally located, equipped with the necessary administrative and financial machinery, quite experienced with handling grants, and situated just next door to RESA A -- Abel County was the obvious choice to become the fiscal agent.

The organizing process also was simplified by realistic language in the SEA guidelines. RESA A was to be a service agency designed to provide benefits to the counties at their request. Its role was to be a supplementary one, shying away (and prevented) from actions that would have the effect of transforming it into an independent force in local education. It was to assume programmatic responsibilities only after receiving permission to do so. As stated in both its own charter and the SEA regulations:

> ...[T]o provide supplemental educational services to the member counties in four broad areas...
>
> [Section 5] 1. established as regional units in the State school system which provide supplementary educational benefits to county school systems...

Any matter internal to a district would remain subject to local prerogatives unless it had regional promise and appeared amenable to regional solutions -- at which point RESA A would enter the scene upon invitation. This let the districts relinquish certain programs to RESA A at the outset, giving the RESA immediate programmatic legitimacy and removing the need to design on its own (and of its own free will) programs that might conflict with local interest. As one person summed up:

> If we were to discuss a problem or a program, then the entire board would discuss it, instead of RESA developing its own. People in the counties like to feel they do not have to be like everyone else --and they won't be. But this way we could all decide what was best for all of the counties.

A contributing factor to the ease with which RESA A formed were prior experiences with cooperation in the region. The counties had sponsored numerous short and long-term programs in areas of educational broadcasting, summer occupational educational training programs, Title III (ESEA) open-air schools, and so on. The primary attention in the region was usually focused on projects housed in, sponsored by, or administered through Abel County. Benefits spread to the others in a hit-or-miss, random, and sometimes very infrequent fashion. Where success did spread, it was because of informal understandings forged among the counties rather than through strict contractual obligations. RESA A provided the opportunity to tighten up this process and serve as a vehicle for programs with regional purpose and scope.

> For example, we had a program in Abel County called [illegible] --Cooperative Occupational Program -- a beautiful program that trained teachers and the like. We decided this could be moved in under RESA and spread to the whole region.

One on-going and tremendously successful cooperative enterprise became a major impetus for the formation of RESA A. In 1966 the U.S. Office of Education awarded funds to the SEA to establish a teacher education center (TEC) as part of the national M-STEP program (Multi-State Teacher Education Project). The project was located in Abel County and provided services in the areas of educating, training, placing, and supervising student teachers. By 1968 M-STEP was such a success that Abel County assumed sponsorship when federal funding expired. By 1972 M-STEP had been renamed MITEC (Multi-Institutional Teacher Education Center) and was serving Abel and Fairfield counties. The colleges and universities in the area were producing nearly 500 student teachers annually to be placed in these two counties alone.

The county superintendents liked the idea of including MITEC within the new RESA. Representatives from the colleges and universities were somewhat skeptical of the proposal since they viewed it as a way to deprive them of a voice in the policy-making areas of teacher education. However, the idea was compelling for practical reasons. RESA A would be a rent-free home. The SEA liked the idea and pushed hard. RESA A would give MITEC instantaneous access to five counties instead of just two. The MITEC board soon saw RESA A as a convenient way of enhancing the legitimacy, breadth, and visibility of MITEC.

Unlike a few TECs in other parts of the state, MITEC retained its name and governing body. RESA assumed control over the budget and hiring. This arrangement met two needs in one stroke. RESA A benefited through its new association with a highly respected program. MITEC gained greater administrative stability and programmatic coverage.

In addition to the inclusion of MITEC, RESA A continued to expand and incorporated other programs, such as adult basic education and public service training. All the districts operated adult basic education (ABE) programs prior to its formation. The board decided to consolidate certain functions under one roof, effectively reducing five ABE budgets, funding requests, and grant awards into one. The districts continued to develop their own plans, schedules, and staffing requirements. The ABE teachers became RESA employees. Although most of them were part-time, the large numbers still swelled the RESA A staff.

The SEA, through its vocational education wing and in cooperation with various state agencies, had offered public service training courses for nearly fifteen years to local towns and groups needing to meet certain state standards (i.e., licensing, certification, etc.). The courses were in areas such as firemanship, vehicular extraction, and water treatment, and the list expanded during subsequent years. The scheduling and staffing of the courses (as well as registration, certifying, testing, payment, etc.) were arranged by five public service training coordinators who served the entire state from their regional offices. Abel County had one such person who covered a two-RESA area. It seemed logical to the SEA to make this a RESA program. The RESA A board agreed and, along with four other RESAs, moved to incorporate public service training as a programmatic component.

Two new positions were added to RESA A in the first year. One was a special education coordinator (director) to assist the counties in implementing various steps spelled out in the state's new special education law --a law that preceded P.L. 94-142 by one year. The other position was that of a psychologist who would take part in the evaluation and referral of students thought to have learning and behavioral disorders. This person would also assist the districts in conforming to the new law.

The budget grew from $250,000 in 1974 to almost $400,000 in 1976. Most of the funds came from the state. The agency's annual administrative grant amounted to about $60,000. This helped to pay for Wolf and secretarial help. MITEC was supported with a direct state grant and a mixture of local contributions from the counties and the colleges. The payments were calculated on a formula basis. The special education coordinator was paid for by federal EHA Title VI-B funds administered and distributed by the SEA. The psychologist funds also came from the SEA by means of a special allocation from the legislature to the entire RESA system. State grants supported the public service training component (in later years a mixture of state and federal dollars was used). The only local funds were those for MITEC. They represented an average of 11% of RESA A's budget for the three years.

Charles Wolf left the executive directorship after eighteen months to become the superintendent of Abel County. He continued his association with RESA A as a member of its executive board. His sudden departure had nothing to do with his performance at RESA A's helm, but rather, was due to a local political controversy.

Robert Wilson was the superintendent of Dartmouth County schools at that time. A trusted man, he had a strong familiarity with RESA A as a member of the board since the agency's inception. He became the new executive director shortly after Wolf's departure. His selection was a wise and popular move. From his new post he continued the strategy of developing new programs and transforming existing services into more efficient, effective, visible, and equitable regional programs.

By 1976 it was clear to many that more had to be done to identify and serve the needs of gifted and talented students. Wilson and his special education staff began to meet with district personnel to explore ways of funding and designing a regional program in this area of emphasis. The SEA said funds might be available through ESEA Title IV-C. A proposal succeeded in securing enough money to pay for one year of planning and three years of operation -- sufficient to cover a director and three teachers in gifted education. Project Talent was born and became an instant success story. The project helped to implement various modules for the gifted in ways that met the needs of all the counties.

RESA A became a resource center for an adult basic education Vietnamese program in 1978-79. A short-term federal grant paid for the purchase, inventory, and distribution of materials for voluntary projects throughout the state. During the same period an audiological program was added to its list of offerings. This was paid for through a legislative allocation for the SEA to establish RESA-based services for hearing impaired students. RESA A's audiologist was supplied with new audiometric equipment and given the responsibility to evaluate students upon referral, perform routine screenings in the districts, and conduct in-service training for teachers.

Beginning in 1979 the RESA underwent modest programmatic, personnel, and budgetary adjustment. An infusion of more federal money allowed the addition of a second public service trainer to provide expertise in EMT and related paramedical areas. In a drastic move, the state legislature halved its annual allocations for RESA-based psychologists and audiologists. The appropriation was rechristened "evaluative services" and went toward supporting the audiologists. The other half of the original amount was returned more or less intact to the districts to be spent at their discretion. In 1980 the audiologist and psychologist positions were funded by the state at $32,000 and $54,000 respectively. The following year the audiologist was funded at $29,000, 10% of which came from the counties. The psychologist's budget of $37,000 was paid for by districts using the new discretionary funds returned to them.

With advent of an increasing sophistication in the counties, the addition of more specialists, and the districts' ability to solve more problems on their own, some of RESA A's programs began to shift in emphasis. For example, the need to assure greater compliance with state and federal regulations began to lessen as old mandates requiring the identification and treatment of priority 1 and 2 children were largely met. The new challenge was to provide more informational services and to enhance the capabilities of the vast number of teachers still lacking adequate certification -- a fact that disturbed the SEA and spurred the legislature to demand certification programs.

RESA A developed a new computerized search and serve program in cooperation with Abel County. It allowed state and local officials to track and record a student's progression through stages of identification, evaluation, referral, and instruction. Modest contributions from the counties paid the costs for the first year while a small Title IV-B grant promised to underwrite the expenses from then on. RESA A secured another VI-B grant to design a project that would assess the training requirements of special education teachers needing certification -- needs that demanded services above and beyond those available in local colleges. RESA A contracted with the local institutions of higher learning to provide the courses during summer sessions. The grant paid for the tuition costs.

Other grants helped to sustain programs faced with lean futures and underwrote new ventures. Additional Title IV-C funds paid for a new high school drop-out program called HELP. It also eased Project Talent's transition from an era of heavy operational subsidies to self-sufficiency. A Title IV-C grant paid to conduct a state-wide survey to assess social studies education.

Finally, in a move reminiscent of events surrounding the inclusion of the public service training component in 1974, the SEA decided to use four RESAs as locations for CETA Linkage specialists. RESA A's specialist would perform a liaison function by working with both the SEA's vocational education wing and local grant recipients (such as districts or their vocational education schools) to provide technical assistance in order to ease the administrative requirements of the CETA training grants. The person also would certify the instruction and placement of the trainees.

Therefore, the agency's pattern of growth over the years followed a steady and predictable path. No serious efforts were made to develop "profit making" programs that could underwrite speculative ventures. Nor was it considered advisable to generate cost centers that designed, marketed, and sold services to districts and other organizations on a cost basis. RESA A avoided any form of market mechanism and stuck with grants as the mainstay. The average annual growth in its budget was a robust 17% with a slight dip in the rate during 1977 and a levelling in the years since then. State funds amounted to nearly 51% of the annual budgets; 42% came from the federal government and 7% from local sources.

In 1977 there were 27 full-time and 24 part-time employees. In 1981 there were 26 and 36, respectively -- thus reflecting little growth in light of the budgetary expansion. Of the programs listed as line items in the most recent budget, a majority remain original core programs developed during 1974-75. The rest are additions within the same functional areas. In conclusion, RESA A reached a staffing, and to a lesser extent, programming threshold during its first two or three years of existence.

3. Internal Management

The agency has settled into a comfortable niche carved out of the space among the districts. While it remains a servant of the districts, RESA A has attained a permanent status and is accepted in that light. Much of this is due to its extreme sensitivity to local prerogatives and ability to remain responsive yet unobtrusive. It also results from efficient internal operations. In this section we turn to the structure, style and philosophy of management.

Official management of RESA A is essentially a one man operation. The executive board meets once a month at headquarters to discuss programs and problems. It looks to Wilson as the person with the most information. While the representatives do not rubber stamp his every move, they rely to a great degree on his advice and direction. One area over which there has been a slight difference of opinion has been the ABE issue. Wilson would like the districts to assume once again the management of the program. The superintendents have disagreed, choosing to "leave the hassles to the RESA since they are doing such a good job anyway."

Authority over internal operations is firmly vested in the executive directorship. Everyone reports to Robert Wilson with equal access. RESA A has never had to create intervening layers of management, deputies, or a second in command. This is because it has remained small enough to permit a logical division of labor and control over numerous programs, while avoiding cumbersome lines of authority. No one we spoke to could envision a RESA A so large that it would require "formal relationships and fancy rules." Wilson has considered the time when, if need be, greater expansion will require more delegation of his power. Should this occur, he will seek out "a generalist" who can speak to the various sub-specialities within the agency. The closest thing to a second in command has occurred when the special education coordinator occasionally assumes the role of the agency's point man: receiving and passing along information, requests, feedback, and complaints from the schools and the SEA to the various staff members. During our summer visit to RESA A this person accompanied Wilson to the State House to discuss the restoration of basic administrative allocations recently deleted upon recommendation of the Senate Finance Committee. However, activities such as these do not constitute a major part of his job and are best described as courtesies and necessities that come up during the course of any day. Nor do they interfere with the lines of communication and domains of responsibility that have been established by the rest of the workforce. As such, no one assumes authority over anyone else. As we were told:

> People are treated as equals and act as equals here. Bob's style is trusting and he deals with us on the same level.

At this he succeeds admirably. No one voiced a single reservation about his style or the amount of attention he devotes to individual needs and concerns. The relationship between Wilson and his staff is untouched by the divisiveness, contention, and resentment that plague many small organizations. He sustains the atmosphere by working closely, but not too closely, with the employees. Many interviewees mentioned his tireless, frequent, and informal attention to the workers. One person described the relationships as one where "he acts as sort of an expert in overall administration and as a generalist who relies on us to get the job done while we look to him to make sure that we can!"

Wilson rarely holds staff meetings, preferring to "accomplish more in 15 minutes meeting individually than sitting around with everyone and listening to how hard they work." He conducts no performance evaluations. He likes to oversee operations by dropping in on an employee, chatting over the telephone, passing along compliments from the counties, and offering his assistance when he can. But beneath the air of cordiality and informality is a no-nonsense approach. He screens and interviews all job applicants; allows others in the organization to provide impressions and passes along his final choice to the board for their approval -- which is always forthcoming. The employees submit weekly work schedules so that he is kept abreast of everyone's location. This is not a way of keeping tabs on performance, but to insure that all workers can be reached if necessary. Regular reports are not customary since some programs are more conducive to reporting than others. The employees write yearly summaries that are used by Wilson when he reports to the executive board. Wilson summed up the situation this way:

> Certain programs lend themselves to reporting while others don't. If I asked the audiologist to give me weekly updates she'd miss out on two or three screenings. The annual reports are not part of my written policy but are something I feel is necessary to justify our existence and to demonstrate to the board we are doing the job. I, just like everyone else, have questions as to whether or not we're doing all we can. An area in which I have little expertise is psychological services. If I go over and discuss a service with [our person] and she says it takes three days to do an evaluation I have to take her word... Hell, one of my people could be off fishing for all I know. But the weekly schedules let me know where they should be. I trust they are doing their jobs.

The staff returns the trust. One person described him this way:

> He is very competent. I think he's fair and cares about us. At the same time he lets it be known how far you have gone or can go. You might think of him as a tough good ol' boy.

Wilson requires his employees to understand the scope of their programs and their technical aspects. A particularly useful teaching device in this respect is when he involves them in the budget process. The employees maintain hand ledgers for their own programs. He meets with them to discuss line item discrepancies that may appear from time to time between his comprehensive ledger, their copy, and monthly computer print-outs supplied by the fiscal agent. Quite often the errors are due to the computer, but they require, as we witnessed first-hand during our visit, tedious searches to find the problem. He also collaborates with each person when it comes time to submit yearly budget requests; relying on their suggestions and rough drafts that contain detailed information on pay increases, benefit requirements, and the like. The budget building process remains foreign to some and varies according to the program. For example, the CETA Linkage and public service training components are parts of two state-wide programs with budgets that are hammered out in contracts with the RESAs. As a result, there is slightly less discretionary room to maneuver here than in other areas. Two people commented on involvement with budgets:

> We all keep hand ledgers. It's formal and is in accordance with good accounting practices. I think the more I know about my budget the better.

> Some people get involved with the money questions more than I do. Bob uses the budget as sort of a common link to all of us. I'm still learning... He's been good about it...has never said I can or cannot do something and will point out what I need to watch for.

Much more is involved in fiscal management at RESA A than the regular meetings with the employees. An entirely different realm of responsibility involves Wilson's use of the budget as a monitor of the organization's progress. The technical caretaking duties rest with Abel County as fiscal agent. The instrument itself is not audited independently but when the state tax commissioner comes in to look at the county's finances. Wilson keeps his own comprehensive ledger and uses the monthly print-outs as corrective devices. He signs all purchase orders, "even those that might be for one penny." He reports on the agency's finances when the executive board asks. Supplements and transfers within a program account require board approval, "no matter how trivial."

The primary source of income remains the grant. According to most people who are in a position to know, "all but maybe 5% or 10% of the grants are fixed and untouchable." The discretionary areas are left to the employees to decide how the funds are to be spent: more travel, training, or whatever. The remaining funds are non-negotiable matters, a point which led one person to say, "Sure, I write the budget; I copy last year's!" This leaves very little for independent program development since programs spend up to their limits and then stop. Some programs are aided by picking up free services from other budgets. For example, some programs pay RESA A for rent while others do not. Wilson uses "his" administrative account to pay for generic costs such as custodial care or machine repair.

The complexity of the agency's budget reflects the diversity of the internal RESA A structure. The employees point out that RESA A is a team, as one veteran chose to call it, where the spirit of sharedness pervades. Indeed, this appears to be the case, especially in the special education "cluster" where people share facilities, district contacts, and some functional responsibilities. Beneath the surface of this collective enterprise is the reality that people go their separate ways. Despite the healthy interpersonal arrangement that exist, a number of perfectly understandable factors keep the employees from merging into a homogeneous body. This reality of separateness was underscored by comments:

> I don't have any idea how other people view themselves but I'm funded federally and through the state. When I first came I felt like I was more or less just in an office here...just an employee who had been farmed out by the state.

> There's a realization that even though we all get along quite nicely with each other our jobs take us in many independent directions. This isn't bad, but it is the way it is.

> We're usually in our own world. There is talking amongst all of us but usually not about what each of us do... We have to compare ourselves to our counterparts in the state instead of with the people here.

These realities are not impediments, but instead reflect the fact that people have different job responsibilities, personalities, and dominant professional paradigms. There are, however, undeniable factors which lead to homogeneity. As we found everywhere in West Virginia, most of the employees at RESA A are natives of the state or from nearby parts of the country. They share a strong identification with the surrounding region.

The internal diversity is due to budgetary and programmatic factors. The MITEC, special education, psychology, and audiology programs are linked to separate offices in the newly reorganized Bureau of Learning Systems at the SEA. Contacts vary in type and frequency. A member of the Office of Special Education Administration in the BLS told us:

> You're right. If I had to name one part of the [SEA] where most of the dealings take place with the RESAs -- where you probably find the greatest support for them or whatever...would be in the [BLS]. Of course, RESAs are far and away special education agencies.

This is not necessarily the case. In terms of funding RESA A is not necessarily a special education agency. Only 17% of its 1981 budget came from grants for special education and related programs. On the basis of linkages with the SEA, it has an eclectic make-up. The public service training and CETA Linkage components are tied to the Bureau of Vocational, Technical, and Adult Education. Project Talent draws funds from the Bureau of Services and Federal Assistance. These distinctions should not be pushed too far, but they do suggest there are a number of determinants of diversity. Three examples point them out.

The audiologist is clearly part of the special education "cluster" at RA and shares issues, problem areas, and audiences with the psychologist and the special education coordinator. However, the nature of the job and its functional demands keep the person away from the office a great deal of the time and in constant contact with students and teachers who have only a tangential relationship with other RESA A employees. The public service training employees are removed further since they cover ten counties and deal with groups who bear little relation to most of RESA A's clients. Responsible for scheduling courses, hiring instructors, certifying classmembers, insuring that the instructors get paid by the counties and orchestrating the counties' reimbursement from the SEA, their job is of an entirely different order than others. Finally the MITEC program works as much with college administrators as it does with county administrators, teachers, and students.

In a very real sense, then, RESA A is a collection of diverse, semi-autonomous programs operating well within certain political and technical parameters set down by the executive board and articulated through the style and philosophy of Robert Wilson. The programs are shaped by technical realities and are separated by distinct functional responsibilities. Add to these a diversity in funding, unique client systems, and individual personalities running the programs, and you will have forces sufficient to fragment any organization and invite in the destructive influences of competition and mutual indifference. But this does not happen at RESA A. One reason is Wilson's leadership. The other is commitment to the organization.

Commitment is a sometimes vague word used to describe the bond that holds a staff together. We did not pursue some of the emotional dimensions of commitment that appear at the personal level. A few people told us heart rending tales about unfortunate children and the difficulties faced by the parents. Indeed, a large measure of the commitment at RESA A is of just such a type; powerful attachments to alleviating human suffering and meeting the challenges of modern public education with strong norms of professionalism.

However, the most pervasive form of commitment at RESA A is to cooperation itself; found in everyone's belief that it is the most effective and logical way to deliver services to four counties. Evidence took several forms. One, aside from the practical reasons why people choose to work anywhere (the availability of a job, good pay, and in the case of the public training component, the job was transferred to the RESA), the employees chose RESA A because the concept of regionalism attracted them:

> I liked the regional concept. My background had been in a similar realm. I thought this was the best way for a rural state like West Virginia to provide services, particularly to low-incident children.

This feeling is supported through experience and the philosophy of the executive director. As two people pointed out:

> What interested me was that some of the counties did not have services available. Here Bob wants us to include all five of them as much as possible. I had been involved with RESA A as a teacher and I used it as a lending library kind of thing... So, for me, as a teacher, the image I had -- and still do -- is that it's a place that [one can go to] get resources.

Commitment to the organization comes from being happy with the level of freedom it allows for program change and job design. This is the case in both the special education coordinator and the psychologist positions. Dramatic adjustments have been required with the passing of time and the agency had accommodated these alterations. Another point is that RESA A allows mobility and contact with a wide variety of people --more so, it is felt, than if one worked in a school district. Two comments reflect satisfaction with the latitude provided:

> My predecessor here had a different approach and was materials-oriented. I would consider myself more program-oriented. That hasn't been difficult to approve here -- not that I've had to seek approval. Programmatically speaking, I see our role changing every day for the simple fact that the districts...do have their own services and are in relative compliance with most of the [laws]. We're now into a successful teacher training component that wasn't even envisioned five years ago.

> The job was new when I came and the funding was on line. But the job description and the way I was to operate were not. So, I had to design [this program from scratch]...developing relationships with people in the counties and designing procedures and certain processes.

Commitment to an organization must be based on the assumption that the organization is worth the commitment. At the bottom line in RESA A is a widespread belief that the organization does a good job. We heard widely varying accounts of how the employees learn about their personal accomplishments and gauge the agency's level of acceptance in the local communities. Most feedback is informal: pats on the back, messages conveyed by Wilson, phone calls, witnessing the improvement of a student, thank yous after conducting an in-service session, and so on. These are effective and powerful mechanisms which complement an individual's professional knowledge of a job well done.

However, informal feedback is not usually systematic. RESA A does not invest a great deal of time and money in designing and implementing instruments that measure a person's or the agency's achievements. Nor do evaluations by outsiders begin to approach anything considered regular and comprehensive. The SEA does not monitor RESA A. Visits were set to begin after we left, but as of then none had occurred. They seemed to be delayed by bureaucratic foul-ups in the SEA. The CETA Linkage program was visited by an official from the SEA one time "who wanted to see if everything was going all right."

Evaluations result from individual enterprise within a program and through efforts of the districts on occasions. The audiologist has sent out surveys asking for advice and suggestions on the program. Employees usually receive feedback after presenting an in-service session. Surveys used by the county after these in-service sessions are passed on to Wilson or to the person who delivered the talk. MITEC has an entire evaluative component:

> (1) [D]esign instruments to evaluate all in-service programs sponsored by MITEC, encourage continuous evaluation of the overall objectives of MITEC and disseminate...results to [its] board...and all participating MITEC agencies... (2) [Make] specific recommendations concerning the need, implementation and evaluation of any special project and/or experimental program or using [its] personnel.

Finally, commitment takes on a form that, at first blush, seems commonplace but which in reality speaks to a much more powerful force. The employees strongly identify with RESA A as their employer. They present themselves to client systems as such. There is natural and strong pressure in the client systems served by the CETA Linkage specialist, the public service people, and the MITEC director (to a much lesser extent) that can force a RESA A employee to present him or herself in terms of their functional areas rather than their employer. An endless barrage of questions usually surfaces: "What is a RESA?" "Who do you work for again?" "Is that an Abel County program?" Often the clients served by the CETA and public service people are totally unfamiliar with the RESA system. Also, MITEC has a semi-independent aura about it that stems from a history as a once separate entity that still retains its own board. However, despite forces such as these which can twist one's primary identification, the employees display a strong allegiance to the agency and its executive director.

A new law, and guidelines promulgated by the SEA, enabled the five superintendents to join hands and create a new mechanisms for the delivery of services. With legal, financial, and organizational question put to rest, they went about the business of shaping the enterprise in accordance with their needs. The availability of grants and the ease with which programs could be incorporated led to a sane and steady pattern of growth. The executive director steered the agency carefully and staffed it with people who shared a regional vision. The situation has met with satisfaction on the part of the districts and the SEA. As we have seen much of this is perhaps attributable to the executive director's leadership and the logical unfolding of the organization's structure. But we must consider other possibilities as well; for example, the agency's method of sustaining support from its state and local constituencies.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

No single organization or group in the region can take all the credit for improvements in education over the last decade, not even RESA A. Gains are the result of several things: demands by the state and federal governments and the incentives provided by abundant grants; initiatives and finally, collective action at the local level. RESA A's role in the improvement process has been limited to some extent although the organization itself remains the principal embodiment of local cooperation. While its successes have been notable and the praise of local educators is lavish and readily forthcoming, RESA A is relatively small in size and faces a limited set of opportunities to leave a mark. It constitutes but a fraction of the total activities undertaken in the region in response to educational demands. Somewhat tangential in its role, it pales when compared to the scope of the districts' programming, budgeting, and staffing requirements. We could not help but notice how so many interviews in the districts and the SEA ended with off-the-record remarks underscoring these themes. The comments put RESA A in its proper perspective: RESA A is very small; it plays an important role as a provider but is by no means the sole alternative available to the districts; and finally, its disappearance would pose serious but not insurmountable problems.

To call RESA A a trivial organization would be to deny the reality that its services are highly prized at the local level. We were struck by how often people stressed the availability, adaptability, quality, and cost efficiency of the programs. They continually impressed upon us a theme aptly stated by one person in particular: "The bottom line is that RESA A helps us get over the humps."

The services extend local capacities and provide a backup when shortcomings arise in the schools. They serve a political function as well: "There are still kids out there the counties are afraid to touch because of repercussions. So they call on us to act as intermediaries who handle the case." The services provide reassurance:

> Without them I would miss the security of knowing there is a place to get help. I mean, it would take away from me as an administrator the knowledge required to solve some of the problems we face. For example, we did not write IEPs [until late 1978] when the federal government said we had to have them. We knew that... We looked for help... and went to RESA. You go there to express your needs and they help you solve your problems.

In many instances services would not have been available or at their current levels without RESA A's presence. A superintendent told us "if it hadn't been for Project Talent we would not be where we are today in gifted education." Despite laws and grants that in all likelihood would have been forthcoming anyway, RESA A has provided an extra margin of safety by equalizing services in the region and bringing districts up to acceptable levels of compliance. This includes Abel County: "Don't you think for one moment they have been the paternalistic [leader] in all this; they have gotten a lot out of RESA A too." We were led to believe that without RESA A local education would just be a mere continuation of the limited and inadequate practices that led to its creation in the first place. Some districts would continue to contract for a major portion of their psychological services with private providers. Others would rely heavily on physicians to conduct in-depth hearing examinations. College students seeking pre-placement "field experiences" before assuming their student teaching posts would find them on their own in the same old willy-nilly way. Gifted and talented children would be offered truncated, single thrust modules. Firemen might not know as much about the proper steps in treating a heart attack emergency. The SEA would have to rely on certain counties to house vocational programs. CETA officials in the SEA would feel the brunt of complaints and questions from training grant recipients. And the counties would continue to pay unreasonably high unit costs on instructional and institutional supplies.

"Regionalism does not have to mean you have to deliver the same service in the same quantity to every county." This credo has allowed RESA A to adapt to varying needs and requests, as the following examples show. Abel County continues to use its own nurses to perform mass scale hearing screenings in the schools. The RESA audiologist is called upon only to conduct a limited number of in-depth evaluations. Yet she provides nearly all the audiological functions in three other counties and serves as a back-up for Calhoun County's teacher of the deaf. Abel and Plymouth counties have intellectually gifted programs that predate Project Talent. The project stimulated similar modules in all the counties and added modules in the performing arts, the visual arts, and math and science in Plymouth County. It maintains limited consultative contact with Abel's program. The MITEC director spends a considerable portion of his time coordinating and supervising the large number of student teacher placements in Abel County Schools. At the same time the other districts realize proportionally greater cost reductions through their participation in RESA A's cooperative purchasing committee. Two local administrators commented on the adaptability of RESA A's programs:

> Abel may not reap in proportion the same benefits as the others... because it has a large staff...a lot of expertise and depth, which means it can be independent if it wants to be. But it really hasn't. In the realm of..sharing and coordinating...RESA A offers things that smaller systems certainly couldn't afford and Abel wouldn't want to be without.
>
> Abel will look at RESA A for programs instead of doing them itself because the five counties will benefit...[It] certainly does not get the breaks in costs that the [others do] but I don't want to keep coming back to the dollar thing. You have to consider the services and the costs.

Dollars are more important than the second comment would have us believe. A very appealing feature of RESA A's programs is that, relatively speaking, they are free and require little or no out-of-pocket expense by the counties. Abel County, with a 1980 budget of nearly $125 million, was estimated to spend less than $50,000 on RESA A services. Much of that came from funds reimbursed by the state. Dartmouth County spent less than $10,000 of its $11 million budget. These miniscule figures dramatize the appeal of RESA A. The issues was dealt with most succinctly by one RESA employee:

> We develop projects at no cost or minimum cost to the counties. Cost is the big thing in our way of thinking.

Indeed it is. The cost-free approach means total reliance on grants. RESA A has made little effort to seek contributions from private sources which might appear to compete with the counties. Nor has the organization seriously entertained the idea of joint ventures with third parties (e.g., private schools, state institutions, etc.) willing to pay for the costs since this would divert RESA A's resources and strain its commitment to the districts. The situation as it stands is acceptable to everyone involved. Financial headaches are not as great as one could imagine in an era of resource scarcity. In what must be a rare example, the executive director's efforts to return responsibility for the ABE program to the counties amounts to nothing less than a voluntary offer to forgo a large chunk of the organization's livelihood.

Availability, adaptability, and no cost do not necessarily make for superior services. No one inside or outside of RESA A would claim that the professionalism of its employees and the quality of its services are greater than what the counties could attain acting alone. One local person said she was hard put to think of an instance in which the RESA's "people are better than ours." One RESA staffer explained:

> ...I won't say our people are any more intelligent...or are necessarily the best. We go after the best people we can and the counties go saying that they couldn't have the same quality. I'm saying that if a county wanted [particular services training, etc.] they would call upon our people as opposed to doing it themselves in many cases simply because we are here.

There is a widespread feeling that RESA A is a service agency and, as such, operates according to the wishes and desires of the counties. This relationship is built into the organization's charter, management, and its programmatic structure. In order to walk the fine line between helping and encroaching, the agency invests a great deal in diplomatic behavior and sensitivity to local needs. Some of these features are worth describing further.

Employees who have the occasion to visit the schools in order to provide diagnoses of students, conduct screenings, observe behavior, attend meetings, or offer advice are usually there upon invitation. The districts ask them to take part in cases that have been referred to them. It is during the IEP stage that RESA A staff gets involved, depending on the county's staffing and resource needs. The person may be asked to sit in on the advisory group and report on findings of evaluations performed at the county's request. The procedures are designed to make things work more effectively. As two local people described:

> It's not an attempt to keep track of the RESA... If they go in, and through the fault of no one, just begin to reorganize things, well, that's something I don't even do in my own district.
>
> It's impossible for RESA to know all of our schools. But our [various levels of specialists, supervisors, etc.] know how to broach the subject of having the [RESA person] come in. The direct approach, having them come in of their own free will without anyone in the central office allowing it or learning about it sooner or later will only alienate the schools.

In addition to the formal processes, informal means allow RESA A staff members to deal with district personnel on a daily basis. Once in a school it is not uncommon for the person to engage in work with relevant teachers, nurses, or principals. Once back in their offices the telephone begins to ring. No one we spoke to felt constrained from offering advice, suggesting changes, or initiating meetings with county personnel -- so long as it conforms to the norms of protocol hammered out through years of experience.

The protocol involves keeping the districts well informed. RESA A uses a method of information sharing that was called by one person "making sure everyone knows what you're doing and agrees before you do it." The executive board is a part of this system. Much of its monthly meeting time is devoted to approving plans that have been negotiated well ahead of time by RESA A and county personnel. Wilson will present final proposals supported by various documents and abstracts describing the item. By this time the board is well aware of what is involved. The entire process is time-consuming but ensures that no surprises have arisen along the way. Sanctions and approvals wind their way up through RESA A and the districts, and everyone is kept abreast.

A great deal of the time designing and negotiating new ventures is spent in monthly meetings attended by RESA A special education staff members and their counterparts from the districts. The district people can make commitments over matters involving minor curriculum changes, expenditures of small amounts of money, and participation in a new venture. They submit letters of support used by Wilson and his staff to document the counties' participation. Two people described the implications of the need to involve everyone:

> We don't compete with the counties and we don't keep anything from them. Any time we can, we do almost everything by committee so that the counties will know what's going on. One of the problems with that is the slowness of movement. But we find that we don't want to seek a program that would be in conflict with something that they would already have as a plan. Recently all the special education directors from the counties came in for their regular meeting with us. We're trying to develop a program in child testing with [a local college]. The district people are endorsing that plan...which can be taken to the board and shared with the superintendents and board representatives, along with the letters of endorsement from their staff personnel. At this time the project may not be written up but at the next board meeting an abstract or final proposal will be presented with a cover letter requesting the superintendents' signatures. The whole process takes about two months.

> Not only is this good communication but it requires that you start thinking and planning early. If you are writing a proposal...then you need to talk to everyone even remotely involved...get letters of support, which requires visits, and then get individual signatures from the county superintendents because they have to say "yes." I'm just saying that takes an awful lot of time.

Cumbersome and time-consuming as the process may be, it is the most important structural device used for securing and maintaining the support of the counties. Without the letters the projects are not launched. Whether subscribing to district protocol and having the counties signify their involvement in writing are sufficient to sustain support indefinitely remains to be seen.

5. Relationships with the SEA

No one in RESA A or in the counties is blind to signs that resources from the state will be drying up in the future. When the state Senate Finance Committee recommended that basic administrative allocations be deleted, the action promised that the RESA system will come under increasing scrutiny in the future.

It also revealed ignorance in the State House over what RESAs do. As one person said, "the legislators don't know what the services are. They got off the hook by voting the money back in when in reality they had originally voted to take it out." This state of affairs will have to be addressed through more sustained lobbying efforts by the county superintendents on behalf of the system. The Abel County superintendent did send a letter to the State House in support of RESA A during the funding debate. Most of the people we spoke to said this was evidence that the counties are heavily invested in RESA A's future. However, Wilson will not carry the banner to the State House. That will be a task for the superintendents.

The state may be increasingly tempted to use the RESAs to further state priorities. As one state official remarked:

> We chose to use [the RESAs] because we knew they would do a good job. Also, it's easier to have a handful of local agencies doing the work with 55 different counties than having everything here [in the SEA].

But given the local dynamics we have described here, that is a risky strategy. To preserve its relationships with the counties, RESA A must avoid moves that have the effect of shoving it under the state's sphere of influence. The new Senate Bill 15 has the potential for doing that; however, at the time of our visit it was too early to predict the consequences for RESA A and its counterparts in the state. Needless to say, the superintendents would invite greater state use of the RESA as long as this represented a situation where it would serve their interests when complying with state dictates. One person summed up the prospects this way:

> RESA A will be okay as long as the State doesn't take away services that the counties receive. They established this system to serve us. The [SEA] should use RESA A more for reaching state goals, but not by turning

it into a watchdog. RESA A could facilitate state business and state directions within the county systems by broadening the bridge that exists now between them and us, but which didn't exist before.

C. RESA B

1. Chronology of Events

1965

Title III ESEA PACE money is made available to local county school districts.

1969

A Title III PACE agency organizes in Gladwin County to provide services and training for local school personnel in school psychology. It serves the five counties in the region but ceases to exist three years later as federal funds expire.

1970

The Region B Teacher Education Center (TEC) is formed. Five local counties and local colleges and universities join to improve and coordinate teacher education and placement in the region.

1972

The Legislature passes Senate Bill 183.

1973

Gladwin, Holton, and Johnson County boards of education join under the leadership of the Gladwin County superintendent to organize RB. The Phelps and Riverside County education boards vote not to join. David Binder is hired as a part-time executive director to begin developing a local educational needs assessment. Gladwin County serves as the fiscal agent. The FY 1973-1974 budget is $39,000.

1974

David Binder becomes the full-time executive director. Programs are offered in cooperative purchasing, reading and special education. Two coordinators in special and gifted education and two itinerant teachers for the visually and hearing impaired are hired. Total staff for the first year is six persons. The FY 1974-1975 budget is $87,000.

1975

A program for the physically handicapped is offered for one year and then taken over by the county members.

1976

A program in adult education is offered for one year.

1977

A first annual Regional Math and Science residential camp is offered for local students at a nearby college. The Region B TEC is incorporated into RB and Phelps and Riverside Counties drop out of the TEC when dues are assessed. The state promises to continue to contribute to the TEC if more local contributions are forthcoming. A TEC Digest for distribution to local educators is published.

1978

A first annual RB-sponsored TEC Convention for local educators is held and is quite successful. The FY 1978-1979 budget is $271,000, most of it for special education.

1979

The RB Board of Directors revives earlier attempts to get Phelps and Riverside Counties to join, but is unsuccessful. This is the last year the Legislature appropriates monies to the RESAs for psychological and audiological services. The following year the monies will be given to the counties for them to decide how they should be spent.

1980

The three counties take new monies for evaluation services that have once gone to the RESA directly and turn around and fund the RB school psychologist.

1981

A new school psychologist is added after RB receives federal IV-C money. The staff now totals 11 professionals and two secretaries. The FY 1981-1982 budget is $291,000.

2. History

The five districts in the RESA B region include one metropolitan area, a number of small towns, and a series of rural hamlets. The counties face inter-district cooperation with different needs and justifications in mind. Johnson County lacks the wherewithal of wealth and physical capacity to cope alone with pressures posed by low-incidence student needs. Gladwin County, the urban center, plays the role of central leader simply because its school system's future depends in large measure on the willingness of counties to collaborate on joint, cost-saving ventures. Holton County is the richest district but is not sufficiently wealthy to strike out on an independent path, especially when it is sandwiched between Gladwin and Johnson, the two counties so much in need of each other and Marshall. The remaining two counties, Phelps and Riverside, enjoy the semblance of economic security. They remain aloof from the others and have refused to join the RESA. They avoid encroachment by other districts or financial commitments to neighboring counties.

All the counties share widespread norms of independence and self-sufficiency. Two superintendents describe the phenomenon:

> I guess we set ourselves apart. It afflicts most of us. We have a tradition of doing things ourselves and not wanting anybody else to help to do a better job even if it isn't going to cost.
>
> We're an independent bunch. The simple approach is awful important...It's what you produce that counts...spend too much time trying to get people together and you forget about the work!

Sustained cooperation is no small achievement in a context such as this. Where it has endured the reasons are few and well understood: the ability to overcome fear of outside influence; incentives in the form of money and the promise of better educational services; and finally, the persistence of prime movers willing to undertake the burden of selling an idea and seeing it through to completion.

RESA B is the most recent and successful version of inter-district cooperation in the region. Prior to the mid-1960s it was not uncommon for the five districts to operate in relative isolation. Problems and their solutions were localized and did not seem to be regional concerns. Contacts between superintendents were informal at best and took place over the phone, at luncheons, or at infrequent state meetings. Formal transactions usually involved arranging sporting events or scheduling holiday pageants. Each county had a simplified administrative apparatus requiring little collaboration between staff members from the different districts.

Changes began to occur in the late 1950s when the SEA imposed a mild form of inter-district information sharing. The impetus was the election of Virgil Rorbaugh as the new State Superintendent. Rorbaugh stationed department personnel in various colleges throughout the state to relay information between the counties and the SEA. The system worked reasonably well in a limited way but never became an important addition to informal lines of communication.

In 1965 the Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act making available Title III PACE funds to the five counties who wanted to organize a regional center to provide much-needed services in psychological evaluations and curriculum design. A PACE center was formed in 1968 and operated out of two facilities in Gladwin City. Gladwin County was the fiscal agent. A board of directors was comprised of the five superintendents and the superintendent of the local archdiocese. Problems arose over the agency's legal status, confusion as to its role, and logistics. The superintendents wanted the psychologists to provide direct services to students in the region; administering Wexler and Binet tests, counselling parents, planning curriculum for teachers, and offering systematic follow-ups. However, the center's staff wanted to expand by providing "a lot of sensitivity training and encounter group type stuff." People who remembered the troubles during that period told us these activities were unnecessary deviations from the center's intended mission -- a mission never clearly understood by all participants.

There were other problems as well. One had to do with the issue of effectiveness. Some felt that the agency budget of $100,000 a year "could have been more wisely spent paying for a psychologist for each county." While there were never hints of financial impropriety, there were concerns over the agency's perceived lack of authority to receive and spend money. What troubled the local educators was the absence of a clear-cut organization that could transform money into services that met local expectations.

The center was hampered by inaccessibility. Outlying counties found it hard to transfer children back and forth to the center for treatment and referral. Face-to-face contact between the staff and teachers was minimal. This left a great deal of follow-up in the hands of people who did not always understand what had to be done, "leaving us to ask ourselves 'what do we do now?'" In addition, the center's operations sat poorly with the way local educators did things. Interviewees said the agency was "long on promises and short on action," had "too many chiefs and not enough indians," and a staff that tended to "tell, not ask." The most crushing indictment was a widespread feeling that it was another bureaucracy wasting public funds better spent in each district.

The center left a sour legacy. The counties were understandably apprehensive about new proposals for cooperation, especially ones patterned along the same lines. Needless to say, the idea of a new agency met immediate and universal skepticism even though the educators realized the region needed a cooperative vehicle to cope with educational modernization sweeping the state in the early 1970s. A mammoth bond program was providing dollars for school construction. What kinds of new buildings did the region need? State money was beginning to flow to the counties for special students. What were the regional needs and solutions? "The special education initiative was outstripping us. Novel ideas were left wanting for means. Low-incidence needs were big on a regional scale."

An answer came in 1972 with Senate Bill 183. The Gladwin County superintendent, Dr. Harold Winslow, had been instrumental in seeing that the state superintendents' association and the region's legislators worked with state superintendent Taylor. Once the bill was passed and guidelines governing the RESA structure were forthcoming from the SEA, Winslow held meetings with his counterparts in the region to explore the possibilities of creating a new organization. These discussions resulted in basic agreement and Winslow and superintendents from Holton and Johnson Counties spoke to their respective boards of education. One board member at that time described the local boards' reluctance:

> [I]f we got involved, we were not going to get involved in some kind of bureaucratic organization that merely took some state money and could buy some jobs for people and could not deliver services. But we listened.

The boards' reservations were not lost on the superintendents who were able to persuade them to create a steering committee to study the state guidelines and discuss the organization's potential. In December, 1973 RESA B was created. Letters of commitment were signed by the three boards; representatives were chosen to sit on RESA B's executive board. A chair was picked and Dr. Taylor was sent notification of organization. The meetings were so few and pro forma in nature that no one could tell us how many were held or when they took place. One person actively involved in those discussions recalled, "All I can say is that few technicalities were part of it and the state had no hand in this."

The need for a regional agency and the superintendents' persuasiveness were undoubtedly critical in getting the boards to go along. But the passing of time made the concept compelling in its own right for several reasons. Senate Bill 183 carried an appropriation from the House of Delegates for basic administrative support grants. RESA B would be virtually free to the counties. It would fall under local control and would not be a "strong arm of the state." A representative from the SEA would sit on the RESA B board, giving the counties an opportunity to hear first hand from the SEA. Finally, funds insufficient on a county-by-county basis could be pooled:

> There were several benefits [imagined]. One was the delivery of special services...getting consultants aboard who had expertise... Also the ability to pool resources...the cost of going it alone were prohibitive. We were looking for a consortium...group buying, ordering, etc. And, the sharing of information...the idea of superintendents and board members getting together. However, [if they had] said "We'll need $50,000, $60,000, or even $70,000 to begin," they would have gotten a flat "no."

The emphasis was on savings, not expenses. The proponents were careful to avoid the types of promises that had doomed the PACE agency. Nevertheless, the Phelps and Riverside boards and superintendents were unimpressed. Riverside shied away from the proposal:

> Hell, we couldn't find an advantage in it. You'd have paid dues and gotten little. They'd give us a speech person...and we've got six now! To get one for one day a week was a joke...you can call a spade a spade...the services weren't there.

While Phelps County was interested in saving money the fear of losing autonomy loomed large. RESA B was incompatible with its philosophy of governance. The board had always operated as a "committee of the whole" and this proposal was seen as a means of "breaking away" the superintendent and the board representative by asking them to make commitments without prior advice and consent. The issue was one of sovereignty. RESA B would create a situation whereby "the superintendent...would make decisions that would tie up the board...without the chance to evaluate." The RESA B sponsors failed to convince the Phelps board that it, and not the RESA B board, would retain ultimate powers of discretion.

The final, three-county configuration seemed incomplete, especially when the five-county arrangement was more logical. But, as constituted, RESA B reflected political reality. The appeal of a five-county RESA lacked a successful, historical precedent due to the PACE experience. It also defied political logic.

Gladwin County became RESA B's fiscal agent, a logical choice since it had been the PACE center's agent, was a leader in getting RESA B going, and was centrally located. Facilities for the first year were located in an old Gladwin County public library. The second year RESA B moved to its present location in a Gladwin County school building. The first decision facing the executive board was to choose an executive director. David Binder, a lawyer by training, was chosen from a pool of six applicants. At the time of his selection as RESA B's first director he was working as Gladwin County Title I director.

Binder worked one day a week as director during the first six months of operation. He was joined by a secretary and a part-time administrator on loan from Gladwin County. Only $9,000 of RESA B's $39,000 FY 73-74 allocation was spent during this period; the surplus was added to the FY 74-75 allocation of $39,000. Within a year the staff had grown to six people with the addition of a curriculum coordinator, a consultant who worked on gifted programming, and two itinerant teachers for visually and hearing impaired students.

Generating programs during this period was simple and automatic. RESA B was too small to justify sub-committee and task force activities. Nor was Binder in a position of power to enlarge RESA B's scope beyond that envisioned by the sponsors. The districts "had pretty good ideas as to what was needed." Three programmatic areas considered at the outset were low incidence special education services, reading programs (the state was convening a task force to study this topic and RESA B's curriculum coordinator was a recognized authority on the subject), and cooperative purchasing. The latter idea was largely Binder's. It died quickly when bidding, specification, and storage procedures became too onerous. The impetus for new programs and services was the availability of money and expressions of need by the superintendents. Binder became a focal point for coordinating and presenting information to the board. With time, ideas would also emerge from contacts between RESA B's staff and district personnel. Final approval would rest with the executive board.

In 1975 the SEA funded the RESAs to create the position of special education director. In later years the funds for the position would come from federal 94-142 sources. The position became an important part of the agency's management and programs delivery structure. The person would oversee RESA B's role in the implementation of West Virginia's new special education law (predating 94-142 and broader in scope) by supervising the agency's special education staff and providing special advice in response to requests by the districts. This move by the state was crucial, one person told us, since the state "obviously saw us as an attractive way to assist the counties. It wasn't something we went after, but were given." In the same year a program started for physically handicapped students and was funded by state block grant. In a move that underscored the counties' desire to retain ultimate control, the program reverted to the districts when they could operate it and receive reimbursement from the state. A RESA staff member said "We were in and out within one year, but it had been our idea and not the state's in terms of meeting a need." The SEA began providing funds to RESA B for a psychologist. The RESA system was an effective way to prop up evaluation and provide psychological services to several counties simultaneously. Along the same line of thinking, SEA money soon followed to support an audiologist position in RESA B.

One event enhanced the image of RESA B more than any other. In mid-1975, continuing through early 1977, discussions were held among Binder, the RESA B board, and representatives from two local colleges to explore the feasibility of incorporating the floundering Teacher Education Center into RESA B. The Teacher Education Center had been operating since 1972 as a part of a state system of TECs designed to improve teacher education and placement through the cooperation between personnel in the districts and teacher education departments in local colleges. By 1976 its continuing education and in-service training programs were in disarray. Few member organizations attended meetings or paid dues regularly. The state pressured the agency to tighten up its operations or face a loss of TEC grants.

The RESA B board saw the situation as "a tremendous opportunity for the counties to gain more control over their teacher education problems; so we voted to absorb it." RESA B board members were also on the TEC governing board, and with help from two colleges, passed the move. The TEC board became a policy advisory body within RESA B. Binder became the director of the program, a position that would require approximately 30% of his time. Phelps and Riverside Counties, also members of the TEC, supported the move to RESA B. But when it was apparent that the RESA would insist on receiving annual dues, they withdrew.

The TEC made a name for itself. The curriculum coordinator became its assistant director. A resource manual entitled TEC Digest was published on a regular basis and gained a broad regional readership. Advisory board attendance improved. The state continued its yearly funding. Finally, an extremely successful annual mock convention for local educators and student teachers was inaugurated.

In 1979 the state slashed certain categories of fixed aid to the RESAs. Money for the positions of audiologist and two psychologists at the RESA B were cut from $86,000 to $27,000. Funds were returned to the counties in a form of revenue sharing that let them decide how to spend it. The remaining funds flowed to the RESAs to pay for "evaluation services." Clearly, the amount was insufficient to support the levels of service provided by RESA B up to that point. In a move common throughout the state, the three counties decided to use their new largess to support one of the two RESA psychologist positions. In 1981, Title IV-C ESEA funds enabled RESA B to add a second psychologist after having worked with only one for a year.

Programs were funded through ingenious juggling of state, federal, and local money. A state aid formula package was devised to reimburse special education costs after the first year that the state special education law took effect. In essence, teachers were hired at little cost to the districts. RESA B's role in this plan was as follows:

> In the first year the board decided to use this money in order to hire a person and give them to RESA B. The block grants covered the first year, the formula paid them back thereafter, sometimes to a total equal to less than one full-time person. But, to receive reimbursement, the person had to be on the county's payroll and their "certified" list. That's why some of RESA B's people, technically speaking, are county employees. Of course, this does not involve people such as the special education director who is funded by direct grants.

This provided a means to staff RESA B on a pooled basis. "We certainly didn't have the money otherwise, but pooling saw to it that we did."

RESA B's budget and staff grew rapidly during the first two or three years and plateaued at a level that has remained somewhat constant ever since. Drops in the size of the staff resulted from loss of funding or the occasional inability to find the right replacement for new jobs that have opened up. By 1981 the professional staff numbered 11 people: Binder, an assistant director of the TEC, a special education director, an audiologist, two visual and two hearing impairment specialists, a coordinator for gifted programming, and two psychologists. Turnover in special education programs never created serious shortfalls in the delivery of services since many of RESA B's employees had counterparts in the schools who could continue to function, albeit with an increased work load.

The RESA's growth was closely tied to the skittishness of the counties. Binder was the central figure in husbanding scarce resources and developing responses to districts' needs. From early 1974 through mid-1977, the agency's fortunes were determined primarily by the degree of commitment each district was willing to make. Binder and his staff engaged in ongoing efforts to "prove" the feasibility and quality of programs as a way to assure the counties that their investments were sound. The absorption of the TEC in 1977 proved to be a watershed for RESA B and underscored the superintendents' faith in the organization. After 1977, the staff were able to turn their attention to maintaining local commitment by improving existing programs and defining new roles for the agency.

3. Internal Management

RESA B is not so small that its executive director can oversee every activity of the workforce. Nor is the organization large enough to require a complex hierarchy of authority. The professional staff is independent and requires little close supervision. Formal authority is lodged in the executive director and the special education director. Even so, both people manage the agency in an indirect manner.

Binder was described to us by people inside and outside of RESA B as the right man for the job. They characterized him as a careful man who is good with finances, amiable in personality yet unambiguous in his dealings with people, blessed with a diplomatic knack and a sensitivity to territorial prerogatives, accomplished in the art of communicating, effective as an organizer, and responsive to reasonable demands made of him. No one expressed doubts about his character or capability, although two people in the counties wondered "why in the hell he isn't out earning more money as a practicing lawyer somewhere."

The general administrative guidance of the organization is his responsibility. He interviews all potential applicants and makes sure the serious candidates are screened by staff members and district personnel who would be working with them. The hiring process is a collective one. The final selection must be approved by the executive board.

Performance evaluations were informal and practically non-existent in previous years. Binder has recently implemented a new system with the help of his staff. The idea met with some opposition at first. The procedure combines on-site observations, quantitative measures (i.e., number of students visited, number of training sessions conducted, etc.), written comments, responses by relevant district personnel, and a face-to-face session with Binder. As one staff member said, "Dave's been very careful about getting the right people to look at us; there's no problem on that score." Once firmly in place, the evaluation will occur twice a year. The executive board did not ask for this new procedure. Instead, Binder wanted to present RESA B in a professional light.

He has sought to maintain a professional and collegial atmosphere at RESA B. The employees are usually "in the field" a large part of the time so that the building seems empty. He and the special education director keep track of every employee's weekly activities, not so much to get data on performance, but to know where they can be reached. The employees keep regular logs of their work; running tabulations of people served, places visited, and the purpose. These are used by Binder at the end of the year -- along with a detailed annual report submitted by every employee -- to inform the executive board of the organization's progress. This information is not used to measure an employee's performance, but "to reassure the counties of an even distribution of services." The logs are also available to the counties upon request. Monthly reports were discontinued some time ago when it appeared "they were redundant and contained nothing that wasn't already known around here."

Staff meetings are less frequent than in the past and take place every three or four months. The agenda usually involves a presentation by Binder on current information pertaining to the entire staff: new education regulations, decisions by the executive board, personnel benefits and housekeeping issues. Problems that emerge between a RESA B staff member and a district are resolved at the point of origin unless, of course, they become "matters of delicacy involving issues of protocol and troublesome misunderstandings." These minor problems are handled by the special education director and only rarely require Binder's intervention. We could not isolate any serious examples of conflict between RESA B and the counties. Binder's style of management is to assume every employee is "on his or her own and can handle it in the real world." One person summed up:

> Call it "freedom within structure." You have no question who is in charge but you're allowed to operate as if no one was, so to speak. What I mean is, Dave is very much in control and we bump into him all the time. It's a way to keep him informed and he likes it that way. A lot

of coffee chats, doorway meetings, and "let me bounce this one off of you." Dave is "Theory Y," not "Theory X."

Fiscal management is more formal yet straightforward in operation. Gladwin County manages RESA B's accounts and keeps Binder fully abreast through regular budget printouts. He maintains his own set of working ledgers and receives cancelled checks. Grant receipts are sent directly to the fiscal agent or forwarded by Binder. Binder originates purchase orders but does not write checks. Purchases in excess of certain amounts require the executive board chairperson's signature. The only case in which an individual county board can exercise veto power is when the fiscal agent's board rejects an expenditure because it is illegal. Otherwise, expenditures approved by Binder and major spending actions by the executive board do not require prior approval from the three counties. RESA B's books are not audited separately. Grants from the state are automatically scrutinized before they leave Assistant State Superintendent for Finance James Smith's office. Gladwin County's books are examined by the state tax commissioner, and RESA B is included in this.

Budget formulation is largely predetermined. RESA B takes what it can get. Binder asks some staff members for "projections, wish lists, and ideas to spend money" -- as one staff person called them --ahead of time so that they can be included in annual refunding applications. Discretionary spending for petty cash, special training, disposables, and supplies are factored into each account. Other than that, the employees have little hand in the management of the budget:

> Dave tells us how much it looks like I'll be getting, maybe a raise, maybe more money for travel. I let him know about special needs I foresee and that he may not have considered in the request for funding. But other than that we pretty much stay out of the daily or even the yearly running of the budget. He will let us know where we stand.

The budget renewal process is automatic in most instances. In the case of direct grants from the state for special education programs -- such as money to fund "evaluation services" (i.e., the audiologist) -- RESA B receives a "Notice of Entitlement" from the state. Binder sends in a plan for how the funds will be spent. The only money RESA B actually applies for on a regular basis is a TEC state grant from the state coordinator for continuing education. The application is pro forma and amounts to nothing more than telling the state "yes, we want to continue receiving money." One of the few areas where RESA B openly competes with other RESAs for funds is for small amounts of "surplus and discretionary" federal EHA Title VI-B resources that the SEA has allotted. This money has been used in the past for the special education director's salary, some teacher training, and Search and Serve consultation. It is indeed the case that RESA B's finances are met and managed with little fanfare.

The people working in special education -- the special education director, the audiologist, the vision and hearing specialists, the psychologists, and the coordinator for the gifted -- are professionals who take pride in their services. They identify with RESA B even though some of them are on county payrolls. Most are natives of the area and worked elsewhere before assuming their present jobs. The average age appears to be in the mid-thirties. Everyone we spoke to had a graduate degree in their area of specialization.

The atmosphere is one of collegiality, professional commitment, bustling activity, and over-burdened caseloads. The workers enjoy the discretion provided by their jobs, as well as the freedom to come and go as the situation dictates. The staff interact a great deal since many are immersed in the similar tasks at the schools. As one person indicated:

> We're constantly talking about the kids. Even when we don't share caseloads it helps to get another perspective... We do this after a long day in the field: come back, kick off our shoes, and talk.

The special education director shares many duties with her co-workers even though she is responsible for supervising them. There are very few staff meetings. She uses an open-door approach whereby people talk with her at ease about problems or seek advice. She keeps tabs on how people are doing and offers assistance. Her position provides the counties with an official contact point when it comes to special education matters.

Despite the picture of a happy organization, we saw hints of dispiritedness stemming from concerns over the agency's survival. These included concern over its continuing financial plight, the move by the Senate Finance Committee to zero the RESA allocation, and the slashing of funds by Washington. Nearly everyone we spoke to described RESA B's turbulent environment: vulnerability to shortsightedness and capricious behavior by some legislators, underutilization by the SEA, and the organization's inability to control its own destiny due to the realities of the power structure in local education. As one person commented:

> I think...the writing's on the wall. If the money isn't there...I don't know how much longer the organization will be here. The feeling has been, "well, we will be alright this year." This year is almost over.

The employees have few formal means of measuring how good of a job they are doing. Most feedback is of the informal, personal variety: a thank you, professional satisfaction over a job well done, viewing the progress of a student, and so on. Kudos from superintendents and principals are forwarded to Binder, who then informs the staff member. The district personnel do keep tabs on the number of RESA B visits. This information is available from the individual's log or, more importantly, by reading the written evaluations and assessments contained in a student's file. Both district special education people we spoke to stressed numbers of complaints as an effective evaluation mechanism. But aside from minimal measures, the districts rely on impressions when sizing up RESA B and its staff:

> The performance is a function of the staff...I have not always been confident of certain areas -- because of individuals -- RESA B is not big enough to be insulated from poor performers, so that just one can pull the place down... Their strengths? Low-incident areas, information, access, developing ideas. Weakness? I think we could do as well ourselves in many areas. In fact I think we do.

The staff members accept the fact that their organization exists at the pleasure of the three districts and that, as individuals, they must be diplomats to these systems. They avoid appearing as threats to the district personnel, "otherwise we'd be seen as administrators and that would clash with the old notion of serving." Another employee added, "we don't go in and say 'do this'. Our role is to suggest, or more appropriately, to ask." This sensitivity comes from on-the-job exposure and indoctrination conducted by Binder and fellow workers. Themes instilled are to appreciate that "a good job has to be done;" not to disturb the way things are done; read the systems well and work within the framework; and "make judgments only when it appears there is a better way." One person told us:

> The people in this state and in this area have different opinions of what a RESA should be. When I interviewed I was asked what I thought it meant. I said it meant walking that fine line between helping and interfering and being able to distinguish the two.

The necessity of remaining sensitive varies from situation to situation. But it does not mean RESA B's employees are passive actors in the daily scheme of things. Quite the contrary. They are proactive and resourceful. Two comments sum up the essence of working at RESA B:

> There are some people in the counties we have to work with who, like many folks, exhibit the "let me run this by 6 people" approach. What I have to do is figure out who that sixth person is and deal with the other five later.

> It's an art to avoid the image of an intruder -- which I'm not... RESA B will have a pretty bad reputation if we stop doing our diplomatic homework. Don't get me wrong. It has to be that way. We are a service agency.

4. Relationships With the Local Education Agencies

RESA B stays alive by providing services that are valuable to the counties. But it must work at maintaining support since much of the benefit it provides could be derived by each district acting individually or through formalized arrangements amounting to something less than a separate agency such as a RESA.

The staff members spend an extraordinary amount of time in the districts. Except for the special education director and maybe the coordinator for gifted programs -- both of whom spend more time in the office -- the rest are out teaching and observing students, designing curriculum, consulting with teachers and parents, administering tests, suggesting placements, and reporting to the principals. While in the schools they are under the supervision of the principal, the local special education coordinator, or the school psychologist. Many demands are generated spontaneously because the RESA B person is accessible. It is not uncommon to stay longer than expected to insure that a teacher understands what needs to be done, or to be detained at the last minute to observe a student's progress, or to make promises to "look into matters," or to stop at the principal's office on the way out and apprise him/her of what has been accomplished. Once back in their offices the employees are on the phone, delving into requests generated by the fieldwork. Many contacts (e.g., psychological exams) are routine and scheduled at the beginning of each year by Binder, the special education director, and the school psychologists.

Explicit rules govern circumstances allowing involvement in a student's welfare. Basically, the staff members do not "initiate services, but enter upon referrals involving students 'under process.'" Referrals are conveyed by the appropriate district person to RESA B's special education director who then passes it on to a staff member. The person's role is to assist in providing information that can be used for new or amended individual education plans (IEPs), or to provide feedback once the plan is in place.

This is the official description. Some referrals come to an employee's attention via a shorter route. As one person told us, "I receive referrals I'm sure the special education coordinator or pupil personnel director know nothing about." Requests may come from a principal or teacher. But district special education officials were adamant about rules governing RESA B staff:

> The governing rule is: entry based on a problem and our request. Now, we're not hard nosed, nor do RESA B folks roam the halls looking for referrals. They keep their eyes peeled and look out for problems. We want that...that occurs once they're in the system. But otherwise, their participation in [assessments] or placements is not automatic.
>
> It varies. All sorts of conversations take place... The sequence is this: a problem then the nurse or maybe a counselor, then the [SBAT -- school based assistance team], maybe a medical test, if not, then the school psychologist, then me. I call RESA B.

The RESA staff members also provide indirect services such as in-service training, one-on-one consultation, or continuing education. The state requires in-service training for teachers and RESA B personnel will conduct or participate in many sessions at the county level. The coordinator for gifted programming recently taught an evening course for credit for teacher certification requirements. Holton County asked him to do this. The special education director has conducted workshops in the area of learning disabilities, spoken to principals on the law and the handicapped, and discussed evaluation and observation procedures with teachers. The total number of training courses has surpassed what district personnel expected from RESA B. One of them commented:

> We do most of the requesting. Frankly, the numbers and quality have been good. Since I'm a generalist I look to RESA B to provide the esoteric stuff, the latest trends, findings of studies, outcomes of conferences, and so on. We have little time to do that.

Other opportunities to provide indirect services arise when districts undergo administrative reviews by the state every year and comprehensive evaluations every five years. RESA B has been heavily involved in evaluations at Holton and Johnson Counties. One RESA staff member described their role:

> I went ahead before hand and worked with some teachers in terms of helping them prepare for it...forms the state would be looking at, questions they'd ask, etc.

In addition, some RESA employees have served on evaluation teams reviewing districts throughout the state.

One of the important indirect services provided by RESA B is a monthly meeting between its special education director and district personnel: special education teachers and coordinators, pupil personnel directors. The locations rotate; the RESA B person prepare the agenda; the atmosphere is one of discussion. Meetings leave serious policy alterations to the executive board. People we interviewed found the sessions to be particularly valuable from the standpoint of allowing the coordination of technical programs. In addition, the RESA B special education director was lauded for her command of facts and dedication to the counties -- in contrast to the situation several years ago when her predecessor took a more low-keyed approach to inter-district cooperation. A RESA staff member and two district employees described these meetings:

> We get together, talk, and try to work out a regional mentality...They pick who they will send... One thing we've been working on is a standardized form, region-wide, for due process procedures -- also placement forms. I'll report on a meeting I've attended. The topic may be the extension of the school year beyond 180 days for exceptional children and the problems that will create... Generally, it's great to watch these three independent counties work together and admit, "well, gee, we've got the same problem."
>
> It's an excellent way to identify regional responses. We usually talk to our superintendents about what has been decided and they give us authority to act. Eventually, it comes before the RESA board anyway.
>
> I like [the meetings] because you can air concerns regarding very low-incident needs, individual cases, or whatever. I can't commit my district to spend but I can get it... We alter the design of some programs, but major curriculum changes or expenditures of money need approval.

The programs are inexpensive, a factor contributing to their continued use. In 1981 each county contributed an estimated average of $44,000 for special education services and to pay for the salaries of six RESA B employees. Much of the total is reimbursed by the state, making actual out-of-pocket expenditures approaching "maybe $25,000 on average per district." This level of support is not inconsiderable as most superintendents were quick to point out. However it is safe to say each county would lose benefits if they chose to operate independently. For example, the county school psychologists would carry a heavier burden. Services in vision and hearing would have to be contracted out. If the state withdrew all support for RESA B and gave the money to the three districts instead, each would receive $8,000 from the administrative grant, $4,000 from the audiologist's position, and $7,000 from the special education director's position. RESA B's executive director, sensitive to the district's needs but confident of his agency's potential for cutting costs, admitted:

> The districts would get more if we ceased to exist and the money was simply allocated to them but it would not give them anymore people to do what they wanted to do. It's tough to hire a third of a person.

The superintendents hesitated to predict what would happen if the state withdrew support. All lamented what would be the loss of "the intangibles, the sitting and planning, the acquiring of information, and the figuring out programs that make things more effective." The TEC would continue to operate but with much more reliance on state categorical funding. The special education director's responsibilities would fall on personnel already within the districts. The executive director's position would disappear. One superintendent doubted this eventuality and stressed:

> If we had to assume extra charges it would be a burden. Johnson County would be in jeopardy. Some programs would be dropped and others would be restructured.

The concern amongst local educators is not how the districts would survive without RESA B, but how the quality of programming would change without the extra measure of attention provided by ancillary programs and people at RESA B. "You can survive, but the moral question is whether we'd want to survive as we did in the 50's."

A way to determine local education without RESA B is to look at service quality offered in Phelps and Riverside Counties. RESA B's member superintendents believe that their services are better.

> They've convinced their boards they can do the same things...that RESA B can do, knowing full well they can't but they've convinced their boards they can...I hasten to add, they are my friends and damn good administrators.

Special education personnel are less convinced, however, and feel the services in Phelps and Riverside "might be just as good as ours, but much more expensive." The superintendents in the holdout counties naturally disagree on both counts and cite personnel levels in the area of special education that match those in the other counties. As one administrator put it:

> In terms of special education the state doesn't write us up for failing. If you look at dollars we measure up.

Both counties rely heavily on contracting and "out of state" placements. We were not able to see the costs incurred by providing these services, but, as a board member in one of RESA B's districts said, "There is no way on God's green earth they save the money we do." The RESA B members argue that Phelps and Riverside employees will some day exert greater pressure to join the RESA. Recently a Phelps County parent tried to get her child into a program provided by RESA B and Phelps, as one person said, "made sure the service was provided, and quick."

The attractiveness of RESA B's programs has not been sufficient to get the two counties to join. Every year invitations are extended and a letter is sent explaining RESA B's services. Visits are made to the two boards of education. At one point Riverside's superintendent leaned in the direction of joining but was unable to convince his board. The five superintendents remain friends and meet occasionally at state functions, over lunch, and talk frequently on the telephone. Lobbying efforts to get the counties to join up have become less intense in recent years. The official line is that the three counties want Phelps and Riverside to sign up. However the unofficial line is different. There is a fear that "the static pie would be cut five instead of three ways.." Although Phelps and Riverside would presumably contribute their fair share if they joined, certain fixed grants to RESA B would not grow with the inclusion of the two counties. No state money goes to Phelps or Riverside for an audiologist. In addition, they do not share part of RESA B's administrative grant. Even increased funding would not pay for the extra services demanded and RESA B personnel would be stretched thin. One superintendent tried to explain this sense:

> If they don't join we don't have to share the funds...the services...it's all our own. What's happening is a sub-conscious admission on our part that we're better off without them. So when we talk it has become more of a joking-kind of procedure...than any serious discussion involving the two [counties].

There is no feeling in RESA B that services or image have suffered without Phelps and Riverside. No one recalled hearing aspersions cast upon RESA B's viability or performance by state officials or felt any pressure from the state to get them to join.

RESA B works to maintain external support and satisfy strategic constituencies. It does this while remaining under the effective control of the executive board. While the agency enjoys recognition by the SEA and receives state funds, it is not a vehicle for major state programs. Instead, the agency focuses on keeping the districts informed and serving as a context for regular contact.

These responsibilities fall in the lap of the executive director. His role means he spends a lot of time funnelling information to the counties and arranging meetings. As one of eight RESA directors who constitute an informal hot-line network, he passes along news to the superintendents, including the two in Phelps and Riverside Counties "as a courtesy and a service, not out of some obligation." He is receptive to continual expressions of need, hints or explicit requests, and sees to it that they appear as items for discussion on the agendas of upcoming meetings. He talks most often with Harold Winslow, the current executive board chairman. Time requirements for attending meetings are not that great. The amount of preparation that goes into them, however, is considerable. As the chairman of the TEC Binder works in close collaboration with area colleges and universities. We attended one TEC meeting and could not help but notice how, with the exception of the assistant director's input, the session was a one-man-show. Binder designs the agenda -- as he always does -- distributes it beforehand, presents plans for the upcoming RESA-sponsored mock educational convention, fields most of the questions, offers advice and opinion, takes on requests from the participants and presents the results of previous requests made of him.

He performs a similar function with the executive board. He sits in a position of power by virtue of his grasp of regional information. In addition to preparing the agenda, he acts as the secretary. One board member described his role in this manner:

> Dave is indispensable. He's the person with most of the information we need. The decisions rest with the superintendents. Us board representatives are less knowledgeable. I'd say that aside from Dave's formal report, we spend most of the time discussing matters of which he is a crucial part. It's about 50-50, 50% decision-making and 50% discussion amongst ourselves and with him as an equal.

The executive board is the primary point at which RESA B's attempts to serve the counties come to a head. It is the main policy and decision-making body at RESA B. Eleven times a year it meets for luncheon sessions at varying locations in the three counties. Attending are the three superintendents, Binder, a representative from the SEA, and three members from the local boards of education. The sessions are open to the public and last one to two hours. No one we talked to recalled seeing lay people from the communities at the meetings. Parliamentary rules are followed, but the atmosphere is one of informality and intimacy -- highlighted by a "great deal of discussion." The chairman runs the meetings. Each district has one vote, so there is occasional switching back and forth between each superintendent and his board representative when it comes time to vote. As one board member said:

> My superintendent will turn to me and ask if I want to take this or that one. There haven't been any disagreements between us. I usually let him handle it. The whole show is really the superintendents' since they're more knowledgeable about the nitty gritty than we board members. Sometimes the discussion is about one county in particular, other times it's about an issue I know little about.

The meetings are structured to accommodate the superintendents more so than the board representatives, one of whom characterized the board as a "superintendents' club" with midday meetings causing poor and inconsistent attendance. Another board member said "the superintendents have the natural advantage and we sometimes get snowed in the process."

The typical menu of discussion in the meetings includes a mixture of an executive director's report, comments and messages from the SEA representative, old and new business, progress reports presented by Binder, budgetary and personnel matters, and deliberation over particular students' cases. During the course of any meeting Binder may or may not be asked to look into specific matters since he is the "person with all of the information." His functions vary, as one person stated:

> It all depends how we use him. I don't mean "use" in a manipulative sense since he's a professional resource for us. What I mean is, we have never had to tell him to "cool it." He interprets laws and points out our obligations. He's always reporting on something we asked that he tackle at the last meeting.

A brief list of projects Binder has taken responsibility for at the board's request includes: diplomatic problems with a local college faculty member and her handling of student teacher placements in one county; the growing trend in the state towards deinstitutionalizing special children, the ramifications of this for local schools, and his interpretation of an ongoing court battle in a county outside the region; duties and responsibilities of the three counties now that they are required to handle unemployment compensation; an extended school year for special students; his plans for the annual education convention for student teachers; the implications of SB 15 for the districts. RESA B's potential role is one that "scans the horizon, looks out for us, says 'look, I've found this thing, I think we ought to go after it.'"

The executive board members realize the value of having a regular opportunity for interchange and discussion. For example, soon after assuming the State Superintendency, Dr. Truby expressed to a gathering of county superintendents his desire to see RESAs play an active role in the grievance process whereby parents dissatisfied with the treatment of their children could go to RESA B for adjudication. This was soundly trounced by the local educators who saw it as a swing towards using the RESAs as enforcement organizations. Not surprisingly, the RESA B superintendents used the executive board sessions to express to each other their agitation over the Truby proposal. Binder has arranged events whereby the superintendents can meet with outsiders in a structured environment to discuss these and similar issues. Every year he brings together the superintendents and area legislators for a dinner meeting. Common concerns are expressed and the participants learn about each other. Most importantly, it is hoped these people will come away from the dinner realizing they have just benefited from another RESA B-sponsored opportunity for discourse and interchange.

State and local money has been traditionally used to support direct services to the counties and to fund consultative programs; speculative ventures have been assiduously avoided. This means RESA B has been non-entrepreneurial in its offerings -- a direct result of the budgetary limitations it faces year in and year out. This is not to say that RESA B's role has been trivial or that it has not engaged in seeking new solutions to local needs. However, it does mean that the executive board has not permitted its director to risk capital in order to underwrite the design, development, and marketing of services to audiences other than the districts (e.g., training for a mental health center, contract services for the state, etc.). As such, RESA B has stayed well within a tradition of providing adjunct, supplementary services that are expected by the districts to redound to their benefit first and foremost.

The ongoing efforts by the counties to have an organization under their control, spending their money for their ultimate benefit, has resulted in an agency that by definition "serves" by staying out of realms of activity that are different from what the districts intend. Without a doubt, RESA B's collapse would put extreme pressure on the local districts to make up the resulting quantitative and qualitative losses. However, there is evidence to suggest -- based on hints provided by some interviewees -- that these services, with time, could be duplicated by the schools or purchased from private providers. One effect is that the districts are not overly dependent on the services they receive -- in as much as the districts would not come to a grinding halt if the services disappeared.

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

The state shapes the life of RESA B in two important respects: strings attached to funding and a representative on RESA B's board. We have already discussed the far reaching consequences of various state decisions about what to fund and how to direct funds to the RESAs.

The presence of an official from the SEA at each executive board meeting is viewed as a tremendous opportunity for local superintendents to ferret out the state's intentions and, at the same time, "send messages back to Charleston." The current representative is the head of the SEA's Bureau of Learning Systems. His image of the RESAs and their role in local education is up-beat. The BLS was undergoing major and dramatic reorganization during our visit because of SB 15's requirements that the SEA draw up new plans for quality education throughout the state. Transforming the BLS from a certification bureau into one providing "technical assistance and monitoring the new regulations" falls in line with the director's long-held plans. He was characterized for us as a proactive man who carries weight in the SEA. His presence is one of the few opportunities that arise for contact between the SEA and RESA B. Binder is not in frequent contact with state officials. Most messages from the SEA that pertain to local education are sent to the county superintendents. If the messages relate to RESA B in any way, Binder receives a copy. As a result, the monthly meetings serve as a means for him to engage in substantive discussions. The executive board would agree with the following quote by one superintendent who described the impact of the SEA representative:

> He has an absolute purpose for being there, that is, indirectly monitoring what we're doing. Not formal monitoring, but having a touch with what we're doing in the districts as compared to what the state advocates. We see him as a leg of [the SEA]...clarifying...answering...a vital link...It's not unrealistic to expect that RESA B was not going to be established with total freedom of operation and absolutely no control of any kind. I think the [SEA saw the meetings as one way] of having a foot in the door. That's a realistic expectation. It's there by design. [The state can] exercise a swing vote when it comes to important decisions. When one understands the state constitution, that the state is responsible for education, it's only fair to have a person [from the SEA] as a voting member. I must add; that privilege has not been abused at all. Our representative has acted professionally and honestly.

Another superintendent added:

> The [SEA] really wanted regionalization for control purposes. As [the RESAs] have developed, the control aspect has been pulled back and the service aspect has proliferated to the forefront.

RESA B endears itself to the counties by the programs it provides and through the way it uses state funds. The founders avoided fees or prices for services RESA B provided. The emphasis was to be on having RESA B serve as a repository for incoming state grants and as a place to pool existing resources. The result is that:

> We haven't fully tapped our RESA. I consider research and development to be vital areas...providing, say, "x" thing out there...and then providing the necessary information to the counties on why it can or cannot work. That is a vital role. We haven't performed that service yet because we haven't been able to engender the outside funding.

The recent move by the Senate Finance Committee sent shock waves throughout the RESA system and RESA B as well. Local superintendents were faced for the first time with the realization that the administrative allocation was not sacrosanct. The incident underscored RESA B's ambiguous legal status and required a last minute salvage operation by the state superintendents' association to restore the funding. It also forced RESA B's board to reconsider its casual attitude about the three-county structure:

> The legislature is going to study us this year and if we're going to maintain [the image and reality of] a valuable agency, then it's important these counties join. The board is going to make another effort to see if they can't convince them that it's worth belonging.
>
> The policy decision of the state superintendents' association, and shared here, is that the RESAs' horn has to be blown. The superintendents are the proper people to do that.

Senate Bill 15 may signal a major change in RESA B's agenda. One superintendent described the implications this way:

> [R]ecent legislation, SB 15, a seemingly innocuous addendum of which took just a couple of pages to say, has great consequences for us. Through RESA B, we may get a great deal of [technical assistance], understanding, and discussion of what the state wants.

There was no clear-cut indication at that time whether RESA B will be a primary vehicle for the implementation of the SEA guidelines. However, the current betting is that it will be used in some way as a provider of advice and technical assistance to counties that are having difficulty complying with the regulations.

Largely because power rests with the superintendents, RESA B has not moved of its own volition to capitalize on the prospect and promise of SB 15. Nor has it sought publicity in general on the theory that services speak for themselves. As one RESA B employee said: "If they feel we are effective and can do certain things, and the more they let the legislators know, the better off we'll be." The local perception has been that the state has not been as supportive of RESA B and the other RESAs as it could be. No SEA official speaks for the system. Given what some feel is a neglect by the state, RESA B must rely even more on the administrators in the counties for support. Defined as a service agency, RESA B lives on what it can get and functions within constraints set by the counties. The situation is not likely to change.

CHAPTER IV

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTERS IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut's six Educational Service Centers operate under state law within service regions specified by the state. We studied one of the most successful ESCs in the state as our first site. Because we did not continue with a full scale analysis of a second site and the state level, this chapter differs from the others in its focus on one agency.

A. JOINT ESC

1. Chronology of Events

Pre-1965

Smaller Connecticut towns are urged by the State Department of Education (SEA) to join together and form regional school districts. the SEA offers an incentive by providing no-cost superintendent and staffing services to these towns. (1950s)

Special legislation is passed in 1959 to permit formation of Regional Schools Services Centers. But, the movement towards further regionalization does not catch on.

The SEA withdraws its no-cost services. Regionalization slows, as all towns find ways to provide administrative services on their own.

1965

Congress passes the Elementary and secondary Education Act (ESEA), in order to improve the quality of public education in the United States. Title III specifically promotes the development of innovative programs and organizations. Local level groups are encouraged to apply for Title III planning grant monies. Regional cooperation receives a new impetus.

School districts in the greater Wellington area continue occasional and informal cooperative ventures, such as sharing facilities and borrowing services. These arrangements are ad hoc and involve minor agreements between several superintendents.

1966

The Wellington Superintendents Association (WSA), with the help of Emmette Kyle, Superintendent of Schools in Midborough, and the consultation of a Yale Professor Emeritus, who is a former U.S. Commissioner of Education, pushes the idea of more formal cooperative arrangements between school districts.

An executive committee of the WSA is formed, led by Dr. Kyle, to author a proposal for Title III planning grant monies.

A proposal requesting $54,000 in Title III planning grant monies, to aid in the design of a new cooperative organization for Wellington area school districts, is submitted to the U.S. Commissioner of Education.

1967

The Connecticut General Assembly passes PA 160 (statute 10-158), permitting formal cooperation between school districts to facilitate special service offerings and programs.

1968

The WSA holds a regional meeting to seek out potential members in a cooperative organization. Representatives from area private, parochial, and public schools are invited.

ESEA is amended. Title III monies no longer travel directly to a grantee's fiscal agent, such as a local school district. Funds are now directed through the state level SEA to the receiving fiscal agent.

Midborough, JESC' fiscal agent, receives an approved Title III planning grant for $48,000. JESC forms an Executive Committee, composed of member district administrators.

JESC holds its first meeting. A search begins for an Executive Director, one who will work on projects desired by member districts, write a constitution, and secure further Title III operational grant monies.

1969

The Connecticut General Assembly passes PA 333 to amend statute 10-158. the statute permits local districts to form an interdistrict committee as a means to apply for and directly receive funding, disburse such monies, hold title, employ personnel, and so on. The statute also specifies terms under which districts can join or leave such a committee.

The Title III planning grant year begins. Eighteen districts, including private, technical, and parochial schools, join as members.

Dr. Michael Carleton, an official from the Esbridge School District, begins as Executive Director. Dr. Carleton immediately launches a series of committees to foster participation by the school districts and to compile ideas for programmatic ventures.

JESC' headquarters locates in Wilber, Connecticut.

1970

Dr. Carleton, the Executive Director, suffers a heart attack.

Anthony Rubotto, an official from the Keynes School District, and a frequent participant in JESC' committee work, becomes acting Executive Director while Dr. Carleton recuperates.

The first wave of new staff hirings begins, resulting in a staff of five individuals. Work begins immediately to secure first year Title III operational funding and to launch programs in special education, audio visuals, and cooperative bulk purchasing for area districts.

The first Title III operational year begins. JESC' headquarters moves to a new location.

Indications of mismanagement in the library book cooperative purchase program appear.

Programs for the physically handicapped and the trainable mentally retarded begin at the United Way Rehabilitation Center.

Dr. Carleton passes away.

The staff of five approaches the Executive Committee and requests to be allowed to continue managing JESC.

James Arthur is unanimously recommended by his four co-workers to assume the acting Executive Directorship; the Executive Committee concurs.

Herbert Orland, financial officer for the Midborough School District, is chosen to serve in a similar capacity at JESC.

1971

An audit commissioned by the Executive Committee reveals embezzlement by the director of the library book cooperative purchase program. Unrecoverable losses of $125,000 are eventually repaid to injured districts.

JESC begins a program for children identified as learning disabled. The program is housed at the United Way Rehabilitation Center.

JESC begins offering computerized bulk purchasing of material by member districts.

JESC seeks to renovate the Cottage Street School (CSS), operated by the Midborough Board of Education, to be used for JESC' programs for the learning disabled and the trainable mentally retarded, as well as its headquarters. JESC is prohibited by law from borrowing on its own behalf. Therefore, it asks the Town of Midborough to apply for a state reimbursable grant totalling nearly $295,000 on which JESC will pay the interest. Midborough agrees.

The second Title III operational year begins.

James Arthur, who has been acting director, becomes Executive Director.

JESC begins to move into the CSS, which is still undergoing renovation.

JESC establishes its Educational Resources Center (ERC) with Title III monies, as a repository of information and data on public education. The center provides information searches on a fee basis.

JESC begins moves to change its relationship with its fiscal agent, Midborough, to become an interdistrict committee under statute 10-158. Midborough and other districts see advantages in the interdistrict arrangement.

1972

JESC launches a full campaign for interdistrict committee status by holding informational meetings with boards of education of each member district. A change in constitution is eventually approved by every member district board.

Local parents ask JESC to continue its program for the trainable mentally retarded, located at the CSS, for one more year.

The third Title III operational year begins.

JESC becomes an interdistrict committee and acquires the ability to hold title, hire, fire, contract, apply for and disburse funds.

Steven Cara is elected the chair of JESC' new governing board.

A few districts leave JESC, fearing possible financial liabilities under 10-158 status.

JESC acquires the computerized ERIC annotation system for ERC.

JESC begins programs in the arts and for gifted and talented children. Although the programs are housed in two, temporary facilities, JESC begins renovation on a new, centralized facility in Wellington. Costs are paid for by federal monies and a flat state grant to the city of Wellington.

Staff at CSS and the United Way Rehabilitation Center begin noticing much more severe disabilities in some children, preventing their successful return to public school classrooms. A program is started at CSS for the emotionally disturbed/learning disabled. Planning begins for a program for autistic children.

1973

The Executive Director begins relinquishing some control over individual program budgets. Initial attempts are made to decentralize the management of program budgets to the program level.

The Wellington School District finally receives funding to start a regional program for trainable mentally retarded children. JESC closes its program at CSS.

The program for the physically handicapped, located at the United Way Rehabilitation Center, leaves that location and re-locates in two separate locations.

JESC' Title III operational grant ends.

The SEA begins to view, and fund, JESC as a vehicle for furthering career education. JESC begins a Career Education Resource Center. This center serves as the progenitor for several spin-offs, such as Metric Education, Environmental Education, and so on, during the next few years.

A newly renovated Educational Center for the Arts (ECA) facility opens in downtown Wellington.

1974

JESC forms a committee to begin work on establishing internal personnel administration procedures.

Mark Shedd (this is not a pseudonym), soon to become a strong advocate for service centers, becomes the State Commissioner of Education, State Department of Education.

JESC' headquarters moves again.

JESC is asked by federal and state officials to take over the management of the state-wide migratory education program, a summertime education, nutrition, and recreation program for migrant children and their families.

In response to the need expressed by local educators that less costly, public, and non-institutional programmatic alternatives be developed for children diagnosed as autistic, JESC establishes such a program, located at CSS.

Four districts in the River Front area east of Wellington desire a vocational technical school. A planning period funded by a special act of the General Assembly proves unproductive. With the encouragement of the state and the four districts, and through the efforts of its Career Education Resources Center, JESC writes a proposal for a model center, receives a three-year grant, and begins running the River Front Vocational Education Center.

Enlarging its role as fiscal agent for a small program for pregnant teenagers, run by a local nurse, JESC establishes the Teenage Parent Program, serving a large number of local teens.

1975

Steven Cara is re-elected chair of JESC' governing board.

The Executive Director is asked to join the Wellington Superintendents Association.

JESC creates a Teacher Application Center that serves as a clearinghouse for resume and application procedures.

Efforts by the U.S. Commissioner of Education, the National Institute of Education, and the Office of Education, culminate in the creation of the National Diffusion Network -- a nationwide consortia of educational projects, such as JESC, that identify innovations in education, certify such efforts, link these with projects in search of innovative approaches, and monitor the relationship between the providers and the adopters. JESC sets up a National Facilitator Project, funded directly by the Office of Education. The National Diffusion Network was funded by section 306 of Title III of ESEA.

A combination of several departments at the state level seeks to improve the accessibility of guidance and counselling information to local districts. JESC is chosen as a subcontractor to develop an on-line, state-wide computer system to provide such information.

Congress passes PL 94-142, the landmark Education for all Handicapped Act.

JESC' Executive Director starts joining his counterparts from Connecticut's other five service centers in regular meetings with Commissioner Shedd and his top aides at the SEA. These efforts eventually lead to the writing and passage, by the General Assembly, of laws permitting inter-district committees to become regional educational service centers.

1976

JESC clarifies its legal status further by becoming a regional educational service center under statute 10-66 (a law passed as early as 1972 and amended as late as 1976). The statute requires biennial evaluations of service centers by the SEA, provides a flat grant to each center, sets a maximum number that can operate within the state, and requires each to provide annual reports on its programs and organization to member districts and the SEA.

JESC moves its special education programs out of the CSS into a larger Midborough facility. Renamed the Cottage School (CS) and leased for five years, this building houses together the following programs: physically handicapped, autistic, and emotionally disturbed/learning disabled.

The arts program reaches the conclusion of its primary grant funding, forcing further reliance on tuition-based programs and rental of its public auditorium.

JESC begins yearly performance evaluations of its employees by program managers.

The State Auditor cites the Connecticut SEA for alleged irregularities in its use of JESC for subcontracting purposes. The auditor claims that the SEA uses JESC to circumvent normal hiring procedures, by contracting to JESC and using it to hire employees who could not be hired under normal state guidelines.

JESC creates a state-wide computer network (i.e., ESCCNET), providing on-line capabilities for districts and other service centers in Connecticut.

1977

JESC becomes a sole provider of guidance and counselling computerized information by purchasing the Guidance Information System and serving as the regional location for its on-line use.

JESC vastly improves its fiscal management by acquiring a computerized encumbrance package.

With a grant under Title IV of ESEA JESC creates the Connecticut State Facilitator Project as a counterpart of its National Facilitator Project. JESC becomes a validator of regional innovative projects which are sought for adoption by other local agencies.

JESC becomes involved with the concept of information and innovation diffusion by securing a subcontract with an organization in Massachusetts called The Network. The latter group is working with NIE's Knowledge Utilization Group to perfect the concept of linking agents who spread information on educational innovations to local districts.

JESC develops programs in secondary and alternative vocational education at the Wilber-Wellington Cooperative.

1978

JESC begins using a full-time business manager.

With funds provided through the State Department of Labor under the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), JESC develops in-school and out-of-school employment training programs for high school students.

JESC develops a vocational assessment center.

The River Front Vocational Educational Center ceases operations with the advent and growth of JESC's program in employment training and vocational assessment.

The function of Program Planning and Development is formalized in the office of the Deputy Executive Director.

Patrice Embry is elected chair of JESC' governing board.

JESC headquarters move again.

JESC establishes a program for children with developmental disabilities. This particular designation for a child allows JESC to carefully steer clear of laws prohibiting the treatment of severe and profound cases in public school settings. The laws are later changed.

JESC experiences severe cash flow problems with the inability to collect tuition payments in arrears from some districts. Several incentive payment plans are devised, but they are unsuccessful.

Initial staff reductions begin as ERC continues to operate data deficit.

1979

JESC receives its first flat grant from the State Board of Education as a state-certified educational service center.

JESC seeks to purchase the old Wellington Water Co. building to house its expanding secondary and alternative vocational educational programs. The state public utilities commission blocks the sale due to a current moratorium on the purchase of certain classes of protected watershed properties.

JESC begins laying off seventeen employees.

JESC consolidates several programs that have been running at a deficit, such as Environmental Education, the ERC, and so on. A new School Services Unit (SSU) is created. Partially funded by JESC's state flat grant, the SSU provides consulting services to member school districts. Linking agents are permanently assigned to each district.

JESC abolishes its Teacher Application Center. A personnel director position, originally an outgrowth of this center, and the position of public relations officer, are eliminated.

With the support of its governing board, JESC begins exploring the possibility of creating its own non-profit arm. This would allow it to go after funds from foundations often precluded by statute 10-66 -- which requires that JESC, as a service center, pursue and receive funds only on behalf of efforts for its member districts. The non-profit arm would let JESC engage in research and consultation, as well as other activities not specifically links to its districts.

The public utilities commission okays a lease of the Water Co. property. JESC still desires an outright purchase.

JESC re-institutes a new version of its earlier management teams. The team contains the managers of JESC' major divisions. Another group made up of all program directors, called the program manager's council, begins to meet once every two months.

JESC completes the first Plan of Organization and Operation: 1978-1980. This is the annual report required under statute 10-66 and sent to its member districts and the SEA.

JESC receives its first on-site evaluation by a team composed of local educators and officials from the SEA. This first biennial evaluation is required by statute 10-66. The evaluation team examines JESC' programs and makes recommendations on each.

JESC begins further reductions in the ERC staff.

JESC decides to have a bill introduced by local representatives in the General Assembly to provide an exception to the law prohibiting purchases of certain classes of protected watershed property. This exception would allow the purchase of the Water Co. property.

1980

A bill is introduced that would allow a waiver, permitting JESC to purchase the Water Co. property. The bill dies in legislative committee. The Executive Director seeks to refile purchase petitions with the public utilities commission.

The State of Connecticut develops a State Occupational Information Coordinating Committee as a part of the National Occupational Information Coordination Committee. Both are efforts to secure national, on-line computer information about jobs. JESC receives a subcontract to provide this job information to local users.

The Midborough Board of Education alleges that some members on JESC's governing board are not duly elected members of the districts' boards of education. This is required by the JESC charter. The people in question are employees of their respective districts, thereby perhaps voting in conflict of interest. JESC agrees to review the tallies on matters under discussion when the individuals in question were present and voting. The fear is that nearly $200,000 in grant money has been jeopardized. Although it is discovered that not enough questionable votes were involved, the affected measures are reaffirmed by the votes of a properly constituted governing board.

The State Board of Education awards a reimbursable grant to JESC to purchase and renovate the Water Company property.

JESC relinquishes its costly ERIC computer system to the local State College.

JESC completes its second Plan of Organization and Operation: 1980-1982.

JESC ends its involvement with the migratory education program.

A compromise is reached on the Water Co. property. JESC purchases those parcels of the property unaffected by the watershed protection, and leases the rest.

2. History

To describe the evolution of JESC from its creation in 1969 to the present, we have divided the period into five stages. The first was the period of planning and entrepreneurial development, from 1967 to 1970.

During the late 1960's, with the infusion of unprecedented federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and support for regionalization at the Connecticut SEA, the climate favored serious attention to cooperative ventures among school districts. At a time of ferment and innovation in education, many educators believed that cooperative arrangements could offer cost savings and promote innovation by expanding the range of services available to local school districts. In 1967 the Wellington area Superintendent's Association (WSA), which had promoted informal cooperation among its members for years, discussed applying for federal money (from Title III of ESEA which supported innovation in education) to plan and launch a formal cooperative venture. In 1968 they successfully applied for a grant. But several legal and administrative obstacles prevented them from getting the money right away. While they were waiting, they began a search for a director for their prospective center who could develop cooperative programs and secure long term funding. In early 1969, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law that formally permitted local districts to form interdistrict committees. These would be convenient legal vehicles to receive funding for cooperative activities. Finally, in July of 1969, the Title III grant money was awarded to the superintendents to start JESC. The grant provided money for one year of planning. After that, the center would be entitled to apply for as many as three years of operational support. The town of Midborough agreed to be the fiscal agent for the grant. A director, Michael Carleton, was hired and the superintendents set up an executive committee to act as the JESC' governing board.

Carleton's first challenge was to stimulate the local school districts' interest in JESC. He formed over twenty committees of teachers, principals, and district administrators to generate ideas about what the new cooperative might do. Three JESC staff members who were hired at the beginning recall the Carleton days with a mixture of fondness for his energy and enthusiasm, and skepticism about his ability to manage effectively. As one observer put it, "As an idea man and an organizer he was great. As an administrator he was very poor. He had a lot of 'business' ideas but he was not a good business man."

From June 1969 through June 1970, JESC took on some high visibility assignments, like running science workshops for teachers and sponsoring a regional conference on middle schools. Carleton played a key role as a man of enthusiasm and ideas. But neither Carleton nor anyone else gave much thought to the kind of organization that was being created. The year was officially defined by the grant as planning time and Dr. Carleton used it in the broadest sense, to generate community commitment to cooperative ventures.

By the end of the first year of the Title III money, JESC had to move from planning to operations. In order to continue its Title III funding, JESC had to write a new grant proposal for operational support. But, in the spring of 1970, before this could happen, Carleton suffered a heart attack. His illness created an internal crisis and set JESC on a course no one had anticipated. The superintendents quickly hired an acting director, Anthony Rubotto, who had worked with Carleton on curriculum planning. He was young, committed to the idea of regional cooperation, and imbued with a sense of responsibility for JESC' survival. Rubotto hired James Arthur to write the operational grant proposal and run the newly acquire film library. Susan Murphy, whom Carleton had interviewed back in February, came to run several small programs and coordinate the work of the planning committees. All three of these staffers describe the summer of 1970 as a period of excitement, great commitments of time and energy, and long hours spent discussing the future and trying to plan for it.

Arthur, who had some experience with Title III, got his grant proposal written and approved. In July 1970, the organization received in excess of $300,000 for its first year of operations, with two additional years of funding to come. Programs in special education, curriculum, audio-visual resources, and cooperative bulk purchasing were launched. Teachers and two more administrators were hired.

The only cloud on the horizon was the suspicion that something was wrong in the cooperative book purchasing program. As one observer put it, "We noticed huge stacks of books. We had calls from districts saying, 'Where are my books? What's going on?' This went on into the fall. By Thanksgiving, things were serious despite phenomenal efforts to straighten the mess out. The lack of records was astonishing." The Executive Committee, the effective governing body for the organization, was concerned about the apparent irregularities. They called for an audit which revealed that the librarian running the program had embezzled about $125,000. He was arrested but no money was recovered. During the same week, Carleton, who had never come back to work full time, died of a second heart attack. JESC, with serious internal mismanagement of funds and no executive director, went into a tailspin. It was January 1971.

Anxious and uncertain, Arthur, Rubotto and the others reviewed their dealings with Carleton; they discovered that he had made contradictory promises to them and to others, and financial commitments that could never be fulfilled. Instead of further undermining the venture, these revelations created a sense of cohesion and responsibility among the staff. They banded together and proposed to the executive committee that James Arthur, the only one of the group with even modest administrative experience, be named acting director. The executive committee, itself unsettled by these events, concurred and Arthur took over the reins immediately.

These events were critical to JESC' development as an organization. The staff was dedicated to the original vision of a cooperative venture and at the same time determined to erase the taint of embezzlement. They were young and inexperienced. But that spurred them to take on the challenge of saving JESC. The central office staff of five could easily have split into factions. Instead they worked hard together to keep the organization intact and to move it in what they hoped would be useful directions.

The support of people outside the organization helped enormously. Superintendents, school board members, pupil personnel directors, teachers -- many helped to sustain the districts' enthusiasm for JESC' programs. As Arthur told us:

> Losing [Carleton] forced some of them to assume more responsibility than otherwise. It just happened that a member, like Bill Linder, an assistant superintendent who was chairman of the special ed planning committee, became very active calling his counterparts in other districts and saying, 'Look, we've said we're going to open a program for handicapped kids in September. Now let's get those kids delivered.'... Many superintendents felt cooperation was a good thing and saw JESC as a vehicle to it... Also protectionism was a factor since no one knew the real liability of the members if JESC was to terminate quickly. Fear was a factor. Finally there was paternalism toward the staff. They adopted us. They wanted us as individuals to succeed.

So at this point in the organization's history, a small but highly dedicated staff was supported by some strong local district people in a joint effort to realize the potential of a cooperative center.

Three aspects of this history are important to our analysis. First, JESC was beset by two major crises: the embezzlement of funds and the death of its first executive director. Either could have destroyed the organization. Instead, crisis engendered commitment to the organization's success, which explains a good deal of JESC's early achievement. Carleton's management style was divisive and several of the staff had become frustrated with his leadership. Two of the five reported to us that they would have quit if Carleton had lived to continue as director. His death and the shock of the embezzlement changed the situation dramatically in a way that focused the staff on preserving the organization.

A second significant feature of the early days was Carleton's approach to developing programs. He worked from the grass roots. His goal was visibility and credibility. He encouraged the development of many programs simultaneously, but without an overarching sense of what JESC was trying to accomplish. This haphazard style of growth characterized JESC in the years after Carleton's death. As we will see, growth was organized around programs, without a strategic plan for the organization as a whole.

Third, Carleton's illness meant that he was forced to allow his staff to operate on their own. Each of the five staffers who was hired while Carleton was alive and who remained after his death had an enormous amount of autonomy and responsibility. As one staff member recollected that period:

> I think I ended up coming on sometime in March of 1970. Michael had had the heart attack and I didn't know what I was doing. I mean there was no direction, nothing... Carleton didn't particularly provide any direction. My contact with him was bare... The logical thing to do at the time was for me and other people to go back to the pupil personnel directors and try and work with them, to try to get something going... [But] the majority were not significant trend-setters. They had their own interests but I wouldn't say they were a program development group at that point... So a lot of my time was spent getting Cottage School going, finding people, teachers, kids... I probably spent most of my time in materials, students, and teachers and very little in building. I didn't know anything about [building].

The grant of considerable authority to professional staff, particularly authority over program development, is a strategy that JESC has used ever since.

In some ways Carleton's style as director set a pattern for JESC' later development. His emphasis on visible programs, grass roots participation in program development, and staff autonomy were continued by Arthur long after Carleton's death. In other ways he set an example that Arthur reacted against. The staff's anxiety about Carleton's carelessness with financial management and manipulative promises to his subordinates drove Arthur to adopt the opposite style on these issues. Arthur, who was relatively inexperienced as a manager, might have set quite different priorities for JESC without Carleton's model to follow.

Between July 1970 and July 1972, the organization grew rapidly (see Table 4). We can see retrospectively the strategic moves which helped to define the internal structure of the organization and to mobilize external support. In July 1971, James Arthur moved from acting director to executive director. JESC located several special education programs in the Cottage Street school, established its Educational Resources Center, and, most significantly, began to change its legal status to become an interdistrict committee under state statute. Until now Midborough had been JESC' fiscal agent and was completely responsible for all JESC' activities. JESC employees were technically employees of the Midborough Board of Education. JESC' obligations were Midborough's. Although the relationship had been cordial, Midborough wanted to free itself of the growing fiscal responsibility for JESC. The move from a project of Midborough's to an interdistrict committee was a crucial shift in status. As an interdistrict committee, JESC for the first time could hold title to property, hire, fire, contract, apply for funds, and spend all in its own name. The move also meant that JESC would be formally accountable to all its member districts rather than having Midborough as the legal link to the others. Arthur, as executive director, saw the change as a way to create autonomy for JESC. He and Rubotto (who had become deputy director) spent substantial time in 1971 and 1972 lobbying for the districts' support for the change in status. By the summer of 1972, all the districts had agreed and the legal change was made.

By the summer of 1972 JESC had a staff of some 60 people and a budget in excess of one million dollars. This growth, coupled with the impending loss of Title III money and JESC' status as an interdistrict committee, had profound effects on the way the staff saw the operation. In the early days, the issue had been survival. There had been little concern with the long-term viability of the organization. In 1972 this had to change. Without the safety net of federal support, JESC found itself responsible for its own debts. It was out of the womb and into the cold cruel world. Staff were forced to think about internal structure and organizational goals. As the director explained, "1972 to 1973 was a get-your-feet-on-the-ground-as-your-own-agency year and we consolidated and improved."

The organization flourished. JESC had some active, vital programs underway and more in the planning stages, a large staff, and a large budget. Pressure was growing for the executive director to create some coherence and direction for the operation.

Table 4. How JESC Grew*

School Year	Number of Employees	Budget Size
1969-1970	2	$54,000
1970-1971	23	390,000
1971-1972	52	750,000
1972-1973	63	1,026,000
1973-1974	100	1,800,000
1974-1975	154	2,400,000
1975-1976	166	2,800,000
1976-1977	165	3,450,000
1977-1978	201	3,900,000
1978-1979	225	5,400,000
1979-1980	260	6,450,000
1980-1981	275	6,850,000

* Source: JESC business office

The first strong indications that JESC could not go on without stronger administrative control and a clear division of responsibility came in 1972. As Arthur put it, "We also began having full-time administrators in many of our programs whereas before we had just what we called teacher coordinators, responsible for a group of kids but who also ran that particular program for a $1,000 a year supplement in salary. So we relieved many of pure teaching responsibility and let them run the programs.

But although he had put JESC on firm financial ground, Arthur was facing the results of that earlier lack of planning:

> During 1972 to 1974 we began to sense a problem that, quite frankly, continues to this day: we're too diverse. To bring about commonality and overall organizational goals, to get a framework or common ground to talk on, is hard. I can bring these folks together and mention dental plans and vacation days and we get somewhere. But when we discuss salaries and program goals it is difficult.

Nevertheless, the rudiments of a formal structure began to take shape during this period. The struggle was twofold: to allow managerial autonomy at the program level while containing the entire operation under some semblance of control at the executive level. The executive director and his immediate staff preferred a decentralized, informal mode of operation, both because their history encouraged this approach and because they wished to avoid the costs of formalization and standardization. Yet, as early as 1972, pressures were emerging for more conventional management.

During this period of review and consolidation, the problem of control was solved by decentralizing program design and administration and centralizing finances. As the executive director put it, "I had a strong reliance then and now on my program managers. We have a view that, for us, central management personnel who are highly skilled in a narrow area do not help that much in our programs. With all the people who are in charge of the programs, coordinators, principals, they have the responsibility to design and run the programs."

But if programmatic authority was decentralized, control over personnel and finances was highly centralized. Arthur posted all position announcements, made final hiring decisions, and negotiated all salaries. He also personally reviewed all expenditures; virtually no money could be spent without his authorization. The embezzlement had made him acutely aware of the need for fiscal control. His solution was to take personal responsibility for JESC' financial integrity. But it also was his way to reconcile the tension between too much control and too little. If the program managers required autonomy to offer high quality services, the only serious control mechanisms left were budgets and personnel. Arthur kept tight control over both in his hands.

Shortly after JESC became an interdistrict committee, a few of its member districts dropped out. The reason, we are told, was their fear that the statute authorizing interdistrict committees might make member districts financially liable for the center's debts. Whatever the reasons, the drop in membership added another concern for the executive director and his top staff. They needed to become more concerned with what they were offering, how to offer it, and who would pay for it.

Between the fall of 1973 and the summer of 1976, the organization virtually exploded. Major new programs were added and old programs were expanded. The rapid growth was exhilarating but still unstructured. Management supported ideas for new programs and encouraged staff members to raise funds for new ventures. A host of new programs were developed during this period, including the only public school program in the state for autistic children, a resource center for career education, a regional child-find operation to locate unserved handicapped children, a summer educational program for the children of migrant workers throughout Connecticut, a teenage parent program, a clearinghouse for teaching applicants, a vocational education center, and the first computer center. Meanwhile other projects were growing rapidly, including programs for the physically handicapped and for students in the visual and performing arts, and the educational resource center. In reflecting on these years, the executive director said, "During this period I speak of, quite frankly the money was there and we jumped for it." As another JESC manager put it, "We had the image of being young, energetic, creative -- you know, a group of people who could do anything. Miracle workers!... Back then we would do anything. There was nothing that somebody could have come to us with that we would not have tried."

Several forces made this growth possible. A new Commissioner of Education was appointed in 1974 who was far more supportive of the regional centers than his predecessor had been. The SEA, which had always been receptive, became more active, channelling money and programs through the centers to give them visibility and legitimacy. Growth was also spurred by the passage of state and federal legislation requiring local school districts to serve children with special needs with an appropriate educational program. As the definition of "special needs" grew broader, districts faced rapidly growing demands from parents and teachers. They were eager for new programs to meet those demands. These issues are discussed in Section V. The point here is that the market for JESC's services expanded. JESC managers gleefully responded with more and larger programs.

There were problems with this approach. The organization grew so fast that people lost track of what JESC's mandate really was and what services might be outside that mandate. With so diverse an array of programs, staff in one program didn't always know what was being done in the program next door and seldom knew what was being provided by programs located in JESC's other buildings. Some felt that the lack of coherent purpose and adequate communication had left JESC to be merely "a clearinghouse for anybody's project."

Early in 1976, JESC's legal status changed again when its member districts agreed to become a regional educational service center under state statue 10-66. Recent amendments to the statute had been strongly influenced by the executive directors of the state's six regional cooperatives. In 1975 the directors had started meeting regularly with SEA staff, who pushed through favorable legislation. The shift to RESC status permitted JESC to take on independent legal status. No longer would they have to operate "in the name of" the member districts. The amendment also provided state grants to ESCs for administrative expenses. But the districts needed careful preparation and persuasion. In Arthur's words:

> The agreement was a very time consuming process -- developing it, seeing to it that it complied with state guidelines, making sure that boards of education approved, requiring visits to the boards, dealing with developing issues. For example, under 10-66, we can own property -- real property. But that was a major issue for the members... There were many arguments. We finally passed an amendment in the agreement saying that in the matter of real estate a majority vote is needed to buy or sell... We did not lose any members at the advent of the 10-66 thing. We have gained... The point was that we got them to agree to this new kind of relationship which in large measure strengthened us, not in terms of powers but in more flexibility.

About this time as well, there was an increasing realization on the part of the executive director and the deputy director that the organization had become far too dependent on grant money. Many of JESC's programs had been financed originally with state or federal grants. But when the grants ran out, as grants inevitably do, the programs had to fold or find alternative financing. The abrupt shifts from generous funding to financial crisis were traumatic for both staff and clients. A deliberate move was made to finance more of JESC's programs through tuition and user fees. The purpose was to strengthen the financial underpinnings of the organization by removing the uncertainties invariably attached to a grant-oriented existence. The director hoped to insure a more stable stream of income through tuition.

If the period of 1973 through 1976 was one of helter-skelter expansion, the period from 1976 to 1981 was characterized by efforts to contain and control a highly diverse, dynamic, and innovative organization. In one significant change, the executive director shifted from a preoccupation with internal management to more concern for the external environment. During his first six years, Arthur had been chiefly absorbed with troubleshooting within JESC and keeping the organization solvent. In 1976-77 he deliberately began to focus more of his attention on the center's members and on the state. The most significant indicator of this transition was Arthur's 1977-78 decision to delegate some control over JESC' finances to a business manager. A previous experiment with a part-time business manager had failed, largely because Arthur had been unwilling to give him any authority. However, as the organization's budget grew, the executive director concluded what his staff had known long before, that a strong business manager was essential.

As he described it, "The simple transfer of the power of the pen to sign purchase orders within the confines of a budget certainly gave me an hour and a half, or two hours a day of extra time... [I have] more opportunity to deal with the array of relationships... at the state department of education, at federal levels, with my fellow service center directors, with many of the superintendents in our area, and by serving on various state and local committees."

In August 1980 some major issues still confronted the organization. On the financial side, the strategy to replace grant income with tuition and user fees had been largely accomplished, leading to a more stable economic base for the organization. The JESC budget for the 1980-81 school projected income of close to a million dollars from grants and three to four million from tuition and other fee-for-service arrangements. But the move has created a perennial cash flow problem. When income is based on individual students, small changes in student populations can have substantial consequences: "We can make a pretty good projection of the amount of money we should be bringing in over the course of a year. But, if we lost one kid from the physically handicapped programs, that's $7,700. If we lost 3 kids or 5 kids you're talking about a $30,000 loss." The beginning of a school year requires the heaviest expenditures, but the money to reimburse these expenses doesn't start coming in until well into the year. The local bureaucracies grind slowly and some individual school districts have owed JESC as much as a quarter of a million dollars at a time. State reimbursements are also frequently delayed, sometimes until June, for expenses that JESC has incurred throughout the school year. Thus the heavy and growing reliance on tuition has solved some problems but created others.

On the program side, JESC is no longer eager for shiny new programs. As someone told us: "We are a little bit more specific now about what our charge is. Our charge is not to do everything that needs to be done." The entrepreneurial spirit was not completely dead. We were told of one staff member's effort to launch a program on microcomputers, an effort that was one manager's brainchild and strongly resembles program development in the early days. But, by and large, in 1981 the organization was more careful about how it got its money and more selective about the programs it chose to develop.

3. Internal Management

A variety of pressures coalesced in 1977 and 1978 to force the executive director to tighten the managerial reins and to create formal structures where things had been decidedly casual. A system of formal goal setting and planning for each program was set up parallel to the computer-based budget monitoring system. The two systems encouraged program managers and their subordinates to develop concrete short term and long term goals and prodded them to become responsible for meeting those goals within their allotted budgets.

Standardization and formalization do not come naturally or easily, however, and the executive director continues to be ambivalent about their place. In his words:

> I would think that at this particular point of ten years of development, the need is clear to put in place procedures and processes. We are trying, in doing that, to limit those things which have to go to paper. We are not trying to produce the pilgrim's progress of procedure manuals. We are trying to maintain the flexibility notion which has been very helpful to us and the notion of being able to change and evolve. But what we recognize is, you can maintain that, but at the same time you're operating programs year after year and many of them being the same programs, that there is a pattern, that there are procedures that need to be in place that support the ongoing effort and, in their preparation, will actually wind up supporting the ability to be flexible by knowing where you can't be. We are wasting a lot of time dealing with situations that are really relatively routine.

Pressures from program managers also encouraged Arthur to recognize the value of standardization and formalization. Many of them reported to us their impatience with the lack of internal systems for communication and control. In the words of one: "There is a need for consistency, to make written what is implicit. Everything here is terribly implicit... One can look at [JESC] from the outside and say 'Aha! It's obviously a whole organism because it works together.' But when one goes inside, he begins to realize that there are many disparate parts that aren't working together, partly because they don't know they're supposed to, partly because there's no mechanism to assist them in seeing a commonality and a common goal... No one ever knows what will happen if one does something, because one is not always sure what the present rules are." And from two others: "First of all there are no communications patterns at JESC. People will say there are. There are not." "I do have authority, do get basically what I want at a given time. But it's not consistent. I can't say always for certain. It's not like that. I said before that sometimes it's confusing. Jim Arthur is a wonderful guy. He likes to know everything that's going on. He's got his fingers all over the place.... There are times... I do feel that people need some basic type of guideline."

Other aspects of JESC's informal control systems created other stresses. Three more managers: "Jim Arthur will make arbitrary ledger changes and sometimes he'll advise me, sometimes he won't. But he feels perfectly free to make budget changes in anybody's budget." "One of my biggest criticisms of JESC, and the other managers too, is that we don't get income printouts. We only know what we've spent. And I was furious to find out that we had surplussed every budget last year. I wasn't allowed to spend that surplus. That just stinks." "In general [JESC] does more than we have the staff to do. So everybody's stretched thin. Jim Arthur was up painting the building. When you talk to the rest of the people in this organization, it just drives us all nuts. Having your top level administrators sitting there painting is one of the most ridiculous things in the world."

Although it may seem paradoxical that professionals who cherish autonomy should ask for structure, any organization needs some system to get its work done. Prior to 1976, JESC had almost no structure. Many of the staff we interviewed believed there still was not enough.

Pressures for structure were also coming now from outside the organization. JESC's success, size, and professional competence generated expectations from school districts and the state that it would operate according to established procedures. "Coming into our own as a recognized institution in this state, the advent of funding from the budget of the state of Connecticut, the various mandates from our state legislature, and from the federal government, brought more attention on our organization," said Arthur. "Okay, you're an institution; therefore the following things apply to you. You must evaluate your teaching staff. You must submit affirmative action school employment reports on a periodic basis. You have to be concerned with accessibility of your facilities under Section 504." To respond to those mandates, JESC had to become more efficient, to develop standard operating procedures, and to use its scarce personnel more productively. But all of these forces evoked only minimal formalization from the organization.

Nevertheless, the executive director did make several moves aimed at dealing with the increasing diversity of programs and the increasing size of the organization. JESC went through several versions of a management team, and recently developed a program manager's council. Both were intended to channel information up and down the organizational hierarchy. As many people pointed out to us, the professional staff identified more with their own programs than with JESC as a whole. While this created enthusiasm for particular programs, it also meant that people had little inclination and no easy way to learn about the activities of other JESC programs. The result was that only three people (the director, deputy director, and business manager) saw the entire organization as their responsibility. The other 270+ staff largely ignored anything outside their program. This created severe problems of information flow among programs, even among those with overlapping client groups. Both the management team and the program managers council were designed to diffuse and disseminate information internally. We received conflicting reports about how well this has worked.

Another step toward internal coherence was the creation in 1979 of the School Services Unit. As Arthur described it: "I realized that we had a whole host of services going out to the districts, competing for the same dollars, people and attention. We saw that we needed a unit. So instead of Career

Education, Metric Resources Center, Educational Resources Center, Environmental Education Resources Center, Gifted and Talented Resource Center, all of them giving indirect services [to teachers and administrators], you name it and we had it, we now have just one unit." Another version of the same event from another manager: "Jim Arthur clearly knew that JESC was in danger of becoming a special ed organization and we didn't want that. He also knew that these programs were in danger. We were losing money, significant amounts of money on some of them. And we didn't have good management. So that was a factor." Together with some ideas from an innovative, energetic staff member, Arthur brought these programs under a single manager, supported them financially with discretionary funds from the state flat grant, and turned them over to the manager to run.

The internal structure of the organization was slowly becoming more formalized in response to internal and external pressures. The executive director continued to be ambivalent about this trend toward formalization, but realized that a certain amount is necessary. The direction this trend will take is still very much an open question. Although the structure may be better defined than in the early days, the organization continued to be a loosely coupled set of programs. Program managers retained a large measure of autonomy and programs were still the focus of commitment and identity for the professional staff. The autonomy and responsibility lodged in the programs permitted JESC to retain the flexibility and creativity that have been its hallmark.

The demands on JESC are of two sorts: first that it provide services that its member districts and the SEA desire, and second that the services be high quality and cost-effective. Professional standards have been established and maintained through the pressures of internal norms, market forces, and evaluation feedback.

Internal program standards of professional competence and responsibility are maintained through people. We have already mentioned JESC' tradition of hiring energetic, competent program people and promoting them to administrative positions. We did encounter a few exceptions to this rule: people who seemed to be tired, disaffected, and who talked of leaving. But our dominant impression was that JESC is run by a diverse, ambitious, and competent group.

Beyond the selection and promotion of "JESC-type" people, the managers have tried to create a working environment that fosters dedication. Several described their staff's commitment to the children: "Our teachers do not get lunch break. They just know that to deal with our kids you can't take a lunch break." "I don't want people to just work. I discourage that. People have to be willing to do the job right." Another described how his staff willingly "froze last winter. If you want a concrete example of commitment, we had to overcome a deficit and we did it by saving about $9000 off our oil bill." Although one of the teachers we interviewed said that a "gulf" separated teaching staff from administrators at the central office, the program managers believe that their own caring and willingness to work long hours has set an example of commitment to "do the job right."

Because JESC has been a confederation of largely autonomous programs, the program managers and especially the staff identify primarily with their program rather than with JESC as a whole. Many staff members know little and care less about other JESC programs. Several of our respondents characterized this as "our identity problem," where "the allegiance is to the unit and not to the organization." But although this has been a problem in some ways, it seems to work in support of program quality. Where allegiance is to the program, people seem willing to put in the "twenty-two hour days" to make the programs work and to keep standards high.

Professional standards have also been maintained through what can be loosely described as market forces. Although internal norms and structures may encourage program staff to adopt high standards, most of our JESC' respondents reported that the major pressure to perform well came from the need to sell services to purchasers. No one is required to purchase services from JESC. Without good reason, no one will. To persuade local district superintendents and pupil personnel directors to continue paying tuition for their children to attend JESC programs, the programs must either hold a monopoly on a necessary service or they must be competitive in quality with programs available elsewhere. To persuade superintendents to purchase support services for their administrative and teaching staffs, the programs must be better than the district could provide for itself and, again, at least as good as the district could purchase elsewhere.

For the direct-service special education programs, the accountability to the local communities has taken on new importance since the passage in 1975 of PL 94-142, the federal special education legislation. This law requires, among other things, that each child with special needs receive an Individual Education Plan (IEP) each year, which examines the appropriateness and quality of the services the child is getting. Each child placed in a JESC special education program informally examined each year by a team of teachers, specialists, and the child's parents. In addition, district special education directors monitor program quality continuously through the school year by visiting the children they send to JESC. This monitoring enhances the district's ability to judge program quality and to make choices based on those judgments.

State law requires that school districts attempt to provide direct services themselves before placing a child outside the school system in JESC or other public or private facilities. In the last ten years state and federal laws have stimulated remarkable improvements in the capacities and sophistication of special education staff in the districts. By virtue of this increased sophistication, JESC member districts can now provide for themselves many services they used to buy from JESC. This has narrowed the band of services that they are interested in purchasing. JESC, in turn, has been driven to reach out to the frontiers, to serve children with increasingly severe physical, emotional, and cognitive handicaps, and to try innovative therapeutic and educational techniques to reach difficult cases. As one manager described this trend:

> We're getting really the lower functioning kind of kid or the very disturbed. And that's all right, because my feeling is that we should always service a child the public school can't... So it is always up to us to develop more sophisticated skills to deal with the more involved child... In most of our programs we are now getting the multi-handicapped child. We get children coming out of Riverview that are psychotic. We

have cerebral palsy children that are in the Emotionally Disturbed/ Learning Disabled unit. We have very severely emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped kids.

JESC staff have coped by developing high levels of professional sophistication, and by calling on extensive networks of consultants. In order to retain demand for their services, they have had to reach for the children no one else can or will serve.

Similar forces have pushed JESC support services toward higher levels of quality. Districts are required by law to offer direct services. But support services are often discretionary purchases. If JESC is to sell discretionary services to school districts in dire financial straits, the services must appear to be much better than the districts are willing to provide for themselves. With the exception of computer services, this has proved to be very difficult. The computers produced income: "We sell various programs that are used by administrators specifically for accounting and budgeting purposes." What makes these programs desirable to districts? "We provide these kinds of services to administrators that are presently either being done by hand or aren't being done at all because it is so time consuming and cumbersome to do them by hand." Again, market demand has pushed JESC toward professional sophistication.

Professional standards are also affected by evaluation systems. Evaluation in JESC is an uneven phenomenon. We heard wildly inconsistent accounts of whether and how JESC evaluates its programs. Much of what passes for evaluation is quite informal. For example, programs are "evaluated" by the director's conversations with the program manager about program objectives, or by how many districts pay for a given service. But there have been some formal systems in place. The first dates back to Title III days. A condition of JESC's three year operating grant in 1970-73 was a yearly evaluation report prepared by JESC. Since 1978 Connecticut law requires the SEA to evaluate JESC and the other five service centers every other year. The same law also requires JESC to prepare an annual evaluation report of all its programs. Some of JESC's grant-supported programs (for example the state facilitators and CETA programs) are required to undergo independent evaluations by an outside researcher. New state legislation also requires that all teachers and instructional staff be evaluated annually. A plan for teacher evaluation was drawn up three years ago, but the wide variance in staff responsibilities at JESC has made it slow and difficult to implement.

In all our discussions of evaluation, we found that neither JESC staff nor local or state administrators have ever taken these evaluation reports very seriously. As a result, we found little evidence that formal evaluation mechanisms have ever made any difference to the quality of programming. Internally, the JESC managers have been primarily concerned with a program's ability to generate revenue and attract the respect of parents, teachers, administrators, and professional groups. Externally, the local school districts have been satisfied when their children are served, when participants come back from workshops feeling informed and consulted, and when contracts are adequately fulfilled. The state officials we interviewed also felt little need for systematic evaluative data. So long as JESC satisfies the districts and remains in sound financial health, the SEA is satisfied.

But if formal evaluation systems are unimportant, we did find considerable evidence that people in JESC pay attention to informal indicators of performance. The special education program staff pay close attention to the yearly IEP meetings for their children, when parent, teacher, specialist, and administrator discuss how each child is progressing. The arts program staff take particular care with placing the graduates of their high school program in top-rated schools and universities, and are "shocked" when they are unable to do so. The computer services staff have a toll-free telephone line for getting and answering "complaint calls" from frustrated clients. Everyone who runs a workshop includes a feed-back discussion or questionnaire at the end to check on participant satisfaction. And so it goes for all the programs.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

JESC was created as a vehicle for cooperation among school districts. Over the last ten years, it has acquired another crucial constituent in the state department of education. Without the participation of its member districts, its legitimacy would be undermined. The organization's need for active support from the state and local districts has forced it to anticipate, understand, and adjust to the demands of its constituents. A striking characteristic of JESC is the energy it must spend to maintain the good will of its many client groups.

For the first planning year, the member districts have played a role in setting priorities for JESC programming. In that first year (1969-1970) over 20 committees of local educators considered the needs of the member districts and devised programs that JESC might offer. Many of JESC's early decisions were guided by those prolific committees' recommendations. Some of the committees were later institutionalized as advisory boards to particular programs, as in the Educational Center for the Arts, to provide continuing local input to JESC' planning. Many other measures have been used to monitor the needs of the districts. Meetings of all the district superintendents have been convened once or twice a year. These give the superintendents an opportunity to talk to each other and also permit JESC's top management to keep abreast of their members' concerns. Similar meetings are held of directors of special education programs and pupil personnel directors, who make critical decisions about whether to send children with special needs to JESC programs. In theory, the Governing Board, which is composed of one member of the board of education from each town, provides another arena for the districts to voice their desires. But given the limited involvement of elected boards of education in the substance of district operation, this has not been an important channel of detailed information or advice to JESC. The new program of linking agents was created to give each member district an official liaison at JESC whose job is to solicit advice and suggestions. It is too soon to know whether this system will have any impact on programming.

Aside from the formal channels, James Arthur, the executive director, has gone to great lengths to keep informal channels open and information flowing. Every local administrator with whom we spoke said he or she would feel perfectly free to call Arthur about a problem or suggestion. All expected an attentive hearing. Some of the program managers also keep closely in touch with their constituencies in member districts. Such informal contact often leads to marginal adjustments to existing programs, such as the current proposal to offer a once-a-week, full-day arts program for high school students in addition to the four-time-a-week, half-day program that has been running since 1973. These contacts have also led to the establishment of new programs. The special education program for autistic children was prompted, in part, by informal conversations between a JESC' program manager and an activist pupil personnel director who organized a joint request for such a program from some of her counterparts in other districts.

Other programs have merged from staff perceptions of need or opportunity. The history of JESC is marked by aggressive staff development of new programs before member districts asked for them and in some cases before districts were aware that they wanted them. Several of the programs for gifted children appear to have started this way. So did the program for pregnant teenagers. As discussed above, the executive director and deputy director encouraged and rewarded such initiatives for many years, perhaps because they gave luster to JESC's reputation as an innovator.

Other staff-initiated programs grew out of staff perceptions of gaps in available services. This has been characteristic of programs in special education. For example, the impetus for the program for severe and profound mentally retarded children was described to us:

> We began to get children coming out of the nurseries at 5 years old who were severely handicapped kids. And it seemed a crime to have these kids be paid for out of public funds from three to five and suddenly at five to have no receiving element within the public school system... The [severe and profound children] would have to go to their regional center for mentally retarded. A lot of people didn't like the regional centers... Most parents won't give up on a five year old. It's heart rending... So I got [one of the pupil personnel directors] on the phone and I said, "You've got three kids. Why?" So she said, "Start a program..." She supported it, [another town] supported it. We started with five children two years ago. We have 15 now.

In other cases, JESC has been prodded by the state to provide technical assistance or other services to the districts to enable them to carry out state policy. For example, JESC was awarded a CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act) grant by the state department of labor to offer employment training and counselling to high school students who qualify under CETA guidelines. The SEA and the State Department of Labor asked JESC to install a computer to give Connecticut towns access to a computerized information bank on career and vocational training. It was the SEA that asked JESC to run a summer program of education and social welfare services for children of migrant workers and keep centralized records of where the children were and how they were doing. Sometimes staff have tried to anticipate problems that local districts will face in meeting state mandates and developed programs to meet those needs. For example, the linking agent program is preparing to help districts comply with new state mandates on comprehensive goal-setting.

The most important constituencies for JESC are its twenty or so member school districts. Within each district, many groups must agree to use JESC' programs: teachers, parents, principals, superintendents, and the boards of education. None of them has been neglected.

Teachers, for example, were involved from the start in the planning committees formed in 1969-70. To respond to teachers' suggestions, JESC offered workshops for science teachers, training in curriculum materials for vocational education, and a cooperative film library as some of its first projects. Their participation generated invaluable commitment. As one JESC' veteran of those days described it: "We needed a lot of involvement... A lot of people bought into the film library because there were a dozen people out there who say they started the film library. They're all absolutely correct. The person who really did it was Arthur, but they're absolutely all correct...they all could take some justifiable pride in it." Teachers continue to get special attention from JESC. We seldom walked into JESC headquarters without being greeted by a sign directing us to a teacher training workshop. JESC managers also try to be sensitive to potential conflicts between their programs and those of district teachers. One nagging conflict arises out of the high school performing arts program. Music teachers in the districts regularly lose their most talented students to this program. As JESC's arts program manager described it: "The classical music area. Someone who's really playing their head off expresses a desire to come to [JESC] and gets in. They're gone. The classical music area's very small but it creates tremendous antagonism. I'm working on modification of that particular program so that we won't pull the kid out all the time."

Managers of direct service programs also pay attention to the parents of their students. Because parents have legal rights to participate in decisions about their children's education, JESC managers know that parents must be satisfied or the children may be withdrawn from their programs. Reaching out to parents, involving them in their child's education, makes sense educationally. It also makes good political sense. One manager described his efforts to keep in touch with parents:

> The classrooms have always been open to parents. I have teachers here who with the autistic and some of the handicapped, when parents can't get babysitters, will babysit -- which they're not suppose to do... We teach parents signing... I've lent equipment out. What we've tried to do is tell people that once you hit the school that you're going to be part of the processing of your child... We have a parent group... We provide transportation to parents when we can. We do anything to encourage them to come in... When a child comes into the program it's not unusual to have a teacher calling every day to tell the parent what positive kinds of things have happened during the day.

While this program makes the greatest efforts to involve parents, other programs, including those for gifted and talented and for teenage parents, also described efforts to keep parents informed and supportive. And it works. Several pupil personnel directors told us that in ten years they have never received a parent complaint about a JESC program.

Most district decisions to purchase JESC services are made by local administrators, especially superintendents and pupil personnel directors. As we have described, many administrators were centrally involved in creating JESC and drumming up support during its first fragile year. Since then JESC continued to include them in planning and policy development. As noted above, the districts have been consulted often about cooperative programming. One of the most effective ways to solicit district views has been the personal relationships between Arthur and the superintendents in JESC districts. In the early years, these relationships were informal. Now, according to Arthur, "Having come of age a bit, and having recognized that our involvement with the SEA and with the school districts has reached a substantial level in many cases, there is certainly a very strong feeling on the part of the superintendents that they want to deal with me on certain issues and conversely that I want to deal with them. It was about 1975, for example, that the superintendents advised me to join their association here in Wellington County and meet with them on a regular basis."

Another, formal arrangement for communication with the districts is the linking agent program, created in 1979 as part of the School Services Unit. Each district is assigned a JESC staff member whose job is to know what is going on in the district and keep the district informed about what JESC is doing or planning. Linking agents handle districts' complaints, bring JESC resources to bear on districts' concerns, and, in some cases, act as generalist consultants when districts have internal problems. Although the practice is still new, the out-reach function of this job is another manifestation of JESC's long-held philosophy that knowing what is happening in the districts is of paramount importance.

Other activities have been designed to keep district personnel involved and satisfied. JESC participates in the National and Connecticut Facilitator Projects to match exemplary school programs with districts that need such programs. The vocational education staff works closely with high schools: "Our staff would work with their business department and it has developed so that the program we have is integrated into whatever they have going on... And then [we arrange] work experience for the kids after school in the local communities." Vocational specialists at JESC established the River Front Vocational Center as requested by four communities. And computer programmers will create special programs for districts on request. Program managers know that their enrollment and thus their income depend on their ability to offer services the districts will buy. They, as well as the director, are alert to changes in district demand.

JESC has also been careful not to infringe on districts' prerogatives. One of JESC's first programs in 1970-71 was for trainable mentally retarded children. In the fall of 1973, the Wellington School District received some money from the state and developed its own regional program for the trainable mentally retarded. It invited and got participation from five neighboring towns -- all of whom were JESC members. The six towns removed their children from JESC's program. Over the protests of the program coordinator ("We had a better program"), Arthur decided to close JESC's program. By bowing out of direct competition with Wellington's program, he avoided antagonizing JESC's largest customer.

The JESC' governing board is composed of one representative from the board of education of each member district. The governing board members are thus the line of communication from the boards of education to JESC and from JESC back to their local boards. They often become advocates for JESC in their local district, and they present their district's interests to JESC. In JESC's first few years, its board was heavily involved in assuring JESC's survival. The board members pored over budgets and debated proposals for new programs. But, with time, the relationship between James Arthur and the board has become so friendly that the board has been reduced to a symbol of the districts' power over JESC. No longer do board members raise serious challenges to Arthur's budget or program proposals. The only issue in the past year that generated any heat was a flap about who was eligible to vote at board meetings. But because the board still has formal authority to dictate policy, Arthur and his staff continue to take the board seriously and to anticipate its reactions to their plans. Arthur's presentations to the board are carefully prepared and thoroughly documented. He works to keep their confidence and succeeds, thus ensuring himself great flexibility in managing JESC. His attentiveness to the board is another facet of JESC's general concern about keeping the districts satisfied.

JESC staff say that their programs would not exist if they did not meet the needs of the member districts. But what are the districts' view on this? What are their needs as they see them? How much of a fit is there between what they want and what JESC delivers?

School districts have been under increasing pressure over the last fifteen years. The cost of public education has skyrocketed. Total school enrollment is declining. The public is increasingly wary of new tax initiatives and bond packages presented in local elections for public education. Nowhere is the financial burden on districts greater than in the area of special education. State and federal laws have required districts to locate and identify children with special needs, prescribe appropriate educational programs for them, and monitor their proper care through elaborate review procedures.

Districts have limited resources to comply with these requirements. Most have been forced to improvise with inadequate resources. But they have no choice. One local director of special education programs put it this way: "You can't turn away a placement. Legally there's no way I can refuse a child a program for any reason, and money is the least of reasons to refuse..."

As we have seen, cooperative arrangements, such as educational service centers, have been one response to the crunch. In Connecticut, these centers have flourished in those cases where they met the needs of the member districts. JESC's districts have expected the center to provide a quality product at a price that reflected economies of scale. The districts have used JESC' services where they believe that quality has been maintained at a cost they can afford. Three administrators, the first two from the same district, expressed these opinions:

> The major thrust of the problem revolved around the special child ...I just couldn't provide the service for them...at a cost...that I am getting for them in a regional pattern... The laws and regulations were passed requiring us to do more for the so-called "special child," we just couldn't afford to do it on our own.
>
> We could not possibly take care of our kids as well as we do if it weren't for the fact that we belong to JESC. I'm talking in terms of maybe $15,000 to $20,000 a student...
>
> [We] might have one or two youngsters who have special needs...but we

> can't provide a program for the youngster...because we don't have that kind of money nor do we have the personnel.

While the problems of providing special education programs are present in every school district, smaller districts are more dependent on JESC. Larger systems have greater financial capabilities to set up programs on their own. Although they may have more children with special needs, they tend to use JESC only for those cases involving more serious handicaps. But although districts choose JESC as an "affordable" option, services do not come cheap.

> Our problem revolves around transportation cost. Our cost is exceedingly low in terms of tuition... But, when you get into a regional set-up...you find that too often these handicapped children are spending more time being transported and you're spending more money for transportation than you're spending in direct services to the child.

Districts have other obligations in addition to providing special education programs. Like other modern, complex organizations, they are faced with the need to keep their staffs well informed, to purchase material as cheaply as possible, to buy consultation from experts, and to maintain financial control. JESC helps teachers by providing workshops on curriculum development and mailing out the latest on educational materials and trends. For administrators, JESC gives workshops in such areas as team building and modern management. JESC's cooperative film library makes available to teachers an extensive collection of audio-visual materials. Its computer facilities provide information searches, remediation packages for slow learners, and financial information on the account status of clients. Finally, JESC is a source of grant writing expertise. The following statements from two administrators underscore this:

> We don't have the time, we don't have a grant writer, so those of us who write grants are rather amateurs... By dealing with JESC, they have expert grant writers, they can sometimes apply for and receive a grant for area towns in general and disperse the money...

> They have a computer that has a tie-in with a bank of information... We would give them key words on certain problems...[they] would provide us with volumes of material...

> [Our] administrators felt there had to be a renewal of commitment... [an] eye opening session...JESC facilitated the workshops in terms of getting the consultants for us... Teachers like everyone else can go to seed...burnout... [Here] is where we can do some in-service work, which we have.

> One of the people in their gifted education spent a lot of time with us helping us to get a pilot program going for gifted... And then he turned around when it came time for us to write up a program and sat down and put some more time in helping...

Larger districts are also less dependent on JESC than smaller ones when it comes to the on-going consultative services that JESC provides. As one official from a larger district noted: "I don't think that we take advantage of any of those [support services]... Those programs I believe are more beneficial...to very small towns...[We] didn't feel that support service was of value to [us]."

Most of our local respondents report that JESC is more than the sum of its specific programs. District administrators describe benefits they get simply because JESC exists -- beyond tangible educational services. JESC helps them generate and spread new ideas on education. They view JESC as a source of information as well as an arena where people can exchange ideas and hear new things. This arena has many forms, be it the regular meetings of the JESC governing board or the Wellington Superintendents Association (attended by JESC's director), JESC's ready accessibility by telephone, or the on-going contact between district administrators and their assigned linking agent. In essence, JESC can be a clearinghouse for information. Such virtues should not be underestimated. When asked what he felt was valuable in the JESC concept, a pupil personnel director said, "[G]etting together, for information, getting together with other directors...developing ideas, new programs..." The important fact is that a place exists at which "get-togethers" can take place.

JESC mediates, interprets, and facilitates between the districts and the state. One superintendent said, "Personally, I think without JESC we would have a more difficult time dealing with the state department of education." When this superintendent's district sought JESC's help to write a grant, "[T]he JESC people seemed to know exactly what the state would key on and buy... [They] give you very simple answers...[and] try to almost mediate some of these things with the state and say, 'Hey, you've got some problems down here.'" That same superintendent received a twenty page memorandum from the state which JESC crystallized into two main points.

The concept of regional cooperation is basically incompatible with complete local control. When educational cooperatives took on real form in the late 1960s, local educators feared a loss of local autonomy. But, by and large, these fears have been mitigated as the relationship between JESC and its member districts has evolved. Superintendents have come to realize the impossibility of meeting their legal mandates alone and the necessity of cooperation:

> I think we're all in it for the same thing. As far as I'm concerned help for the kids. [I]t is saving us money that we could not afford otherwise.
>
> ...[W]e realized that it was absolutely impossible for school districts our size or school districts even smaller than our size to provide all of the components that were being regulated by state and federal governments, that it was just too expensive...not administratively possible, that we did not have the expertise...

The growing acceptance of JESC has been eased by the districts' control over the governing board and their right to exercise choice in their purchases of JESC services. Superintendents were mollified by having some say in how JESC was to run itself and provide services. For example:

> So we still have the right to pick and choose a service we wish to use for the most part.

> They offer an awful lot, I think, to the region that they serve. It comes under local control so that as a member of the board... I was able to at least inject some things that I thought would be of benefit to [my town] as well as for the entire region.
>
> We have a lot of input. Not only this, we have a service representative [linking agent] from JESC who comes up here to meet with my staff...to get our input before they actually formulate the programs...I never found that James Arthur is beyond my reach...

JESC's accessibility to district staff has promoted the image, and perhaps the reality, of local control. When JESC contracts with a district to educate a child, that contract provides for on-site visits to JESC by school administrators and the child's parents. JESC also informs school districts and parents about the periodic progress of a child. And JESC staff, parents, and a school district's placement team meet whenever a major change takes place in a child's program --as mandated by state and federal laws.

Finally, local districts often have alternatives to JESC. Because JESC is not a monopoly, the districts are less concerned about being dominated. Pupil personnel directors can place most children in any of several schools or special programs, public and private. But state law does require them to look for programs first in their own district or at some other public school facility (like JESC), and only then at private providers. This encourages them to use JESC rather than its private competitors. For a variety of reasons most districts look for programs close by or in the district itself. Sometimes this also works in favor of placement in JESC programs, sometimes against. Some officials dealing with placement decisions put it this way:

> ...I find that if I can possibly provide the same service to the child within this region, within this geographic area, within a ten mile radius, I will do it rather than sending a child to JESC, even if it costs me more money.
>
> The policy here, number one, develop our own program... Now we send children to JESC, no question about that, but before we do that we have to make a determination that we cannot adequately program for the child we send to JESC right here in our own little school system... [We are required] number one develop our own programs, and number two go to a public agency, whether it is a public school...and thirdly, place in a private facility.

But districts have fears nonetheless. Some of these revolve around a subtle abrogation by JESC of technical expertise to teach and treat special children. Others fear that service centers are eclipsing the contact between districts and the state. The issues are complex. Some of the district interviewees noted that staff within JESC are overly protective of the children, promoting long stays over early release. This has surfaced in clashes between JESC's protective concern for the children's plights and the policies of the districts:

> JESC has a tendency to be over-cautious and to hold onto a kid...I firmly believe the sooner we get kids back in the world...the better off they are... [JESC] is operating in their own milieu, in their own world and it

> is an arrogance... [I'll say to them] "You keep asking us public school people to come over there and visit JESC. And before a placement is made to come, observe, etc. Well, goddammit, you never come out to see us...why don't you come out and find out what public schools are like?"
>
> ...[R]ight now the thing is services to the handicapped...But if we have to keep taking from our total resources...the parents of those so-called "normal" kids are going to raise hell... [JESC] can probably do themselves more harm than good by consistently working against us in terms of providing something more than the law obligates us to provide.

In the second instance, some local officials worry that SEA officials prefer to deal with regional centers, rather than with the districts. The director of another service center confirmed that local officials were concerned over the SEA's decision to place a mathematics curriculum specialist in each service center. For example: "As JESC has gotten larger and larger, I've found them to be in more competition with us than to be a viable alternative to providing services on our own... [The SEA] has found from an organizational standpoint that it's much easier to deal with six [ESCs] than with 169 school districts. So the funds...that should have come down directly to local school systems were directed to JESC."

Despite these infrequent incidents, JESC has increased its legitimacy with the districts because the conditions that created it continue to fuel its use. The local people we talked to are pleased with JESC's supportive, low-keyed approach. The director seems to know what the market will bear. JESC appears to be thoroughly pragmatic, knowledgeable about the laws affecting the districts, appreciative of what districts can and cannot do, and realistic in the identification of problems and the design of solutions. In this way, JESC has been successful in finding its niche. As one school official put it, "[T]hey're realistic in the way they approach problems... They can't be a program going off on their own...it's two way communication."

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

After the member districts, JESC's major constituency is the state of Connecticut. Several groups are involved: the state education agency and its various divisions, the State Board of Education, and the General Assembly and its education committee. Here, too, JESC has invested time and energy in maintaining ties with each group.

The SEA has long approved of regional cooperation. In order to translate this principle of support into money and programs, JESC has created and sustained close relationships with SEA staff. Often this has meant doing projects for the state to further state goals. For example, JESC mounted major programs (described above) for the state, such as the migratory children's program. Other requests have been more ad hoc: workshops, staff development, technical assistance. In the first five or six years of JESC's history, the relationships between SEA staff and JESC were primarily program professional to program professional. Top administrators did not have much contact. But through its program people, JESC went to substantial lengths to persuade the SEA that JESC should be taken seriously. They believed (correctly, as it turned out) that the SEA would find them useful, and would then provide both political and financial nourishment. In the words of the deputy director:

> They were short on people-power and staff and had a lot of things the legislation was requiring them to do. Their leadership services kind of went down the tubes. So there were things they asked us to do for them and we would do it. I probably ghost-wrote 50 documents for the state that they weren't able to write... O.K., we had to inform everybody about the provisions of the master plan for vocational education. They had no money to do it. [So] JESC sent out the announcements and got everybody together. It was that kind of thing. And we'd be up there constantly trying to convince the state department we were real, a real education agency. Remember we didn't have any legislation in the beginning so we did it through personal contact, personal involvement with people, getting and having funds up there, doing things for them, having them do things for us.

As JESC grew larger and more visible, the executive director began to have more formal contact with top ranking SEA officials. In part this happened because the regional service centers were becoming more important to the SEA. In 1975, the six service center directors began meeting regularly with the Commissioner's staff at the SEA. These meetings resulted in detailed recommendations to the State Board of Education about how to support the regional centers. These led the State Board to sponsor legislation that provided basic operating grants to the service centers. Through these meetings, the center directors have also been able to guide the SEA's plans for evaluation and certification of the centers.

Although the executive director has become JESC's formal spokesman at the SEA, contact between state and regional program professionals has not ceased. JESC staff still participate in advisory groups and consulting arrangements. However, all were careful to remind us that relations with Hartford were the director's purview. Both the director and the program staff are clearly aware of the financial and political value of the SEA's support and do what is necessary to keep it.

The General Assembly has made several decisions critical to JESC's well-being. These include laws 10-158 and 10-66 as passed and amended, which determine JESC's legal basis for existence and the formula for allocating state funds to the centers. JESC has not established close links with the state legislature. But, in keeping with a general orientation to currents of potential support in its environment, JESC has on occasion actively sought the support of legislators who represent the JESC region. For example, when the bill providing flat grants to ESCs was being considered, a number of JESC managers contacted legislators to educate them about regional educational service centers and their role in public education. In 1979-80, when JESC was trying to purchase the Water Company property, Arthur invited all the area legislators to tour the building and hear JESC's views. During our interviews, the JESC governing board sent a letter to all the legislators expressing concern over a proposed change in the state's special education reimbursement formula.

The orientation of SEA officials toward educational service centers has evolved dramatically over the last fifteen years. In 1965, SEA officials recognized that Title III of ESEA could help the SEA meet some of its educational goals for the state. Regional cooperatives were regarded as ideal vehicles for this, for they could introduce innovation without disturbing the deep-seated tradition of local control over education. By using Title III funds to create regional structures that did not stir up old conflicts over state versus local control, the SEA was able to accomplish what would otherwise have been impossible. Although there were early Title III project disasters where funds were granted before districts were ready for genuine cooperation, the SEA continued its slow and steady investment in ESCs.

The SEA claims a great deal of credit for the survival of the regional service centers in Connecticut. One official says most of the centers "...would have gone down the drain without the support of the state model with the Title III funds and this department." The aim was to build specific strengths into the centers. One was the capacity to handle the headaches of grants administration and overhead, making the service centers naturally attractive to districts. A second was special programming: districts with special education needs but fiscal limits were encouraged to gravitate to the centers, giving them prestige through active, focused use. Finally, the SEA would underline their credibility by using them for its own purpose. One person summarized these efforts: "...[W]e saw the value of them, we maintained *very* close relationships with them. Where possible we bolstered them with grants, with dollars, when they were still young and they hadn't gotten their legs..."

The SEA has recognized for some time that local districts have had, and will continue to have, difficulty meeting state and federal mandates -- especially without large infusions of state money. The Commissioner of Education (according to his aides) believes that service centers are an appropriate vehicle for getting maximum mileage out of limited funds -- for both the districts *and* the state. The strategy of granting original operating costs from Title III, contracts for renovation, grants for program development and staff training, "in hundreds and hundreds of incidences," has allowed the centers to design services that "meet the objectives of the state" while making the ESCs "continuously appealing to the towns they [are] serving." In the mid-1970s, the service center directors convinced the SEA to provide some continuing operational support. One SEA official described it: "Well, if we're going to be imposing certain kinds of...[requirements]...then we really owe[d] them some base of support." This base was created by flat grants awarded yearly under statute 10-66. What has resulted is a complex but balanced interest between the districts and the state. As one SEA administrator put it: "We have for many years provided grants to area service centers so they could carry out, *for us* and themselves, training, implementation programs, specialized services; that because of the limited nature of our staffing we could not do. So, we've used the service centers to help do our responsibilities."

This last quote points out the ways that the SEA has benefitted from the existence of the service centers. First, the centers have provided a convenient location from which the SEA could launch its own direct programs, such as seminars and informational meetings. Second, the SEA got easy and immediate access to the districts more effectively than if they approached all districts individually. These benefits were summarized as follows: "We gave them credibility and an awful lot of attention... And, in turn, they provided us with a service too. They gave encouragement and access to us. This access to us was direct... [JESC is] like a regional office. We can conduct training meetings and it gives us a ready facility."

The centers are a convenient adjunct to the SEA, which has not gotten from the legislature the staff or the money to meet its newly expanded responsibilities. The SEA has been able to circumvent constraints on SEA hiring by contracting certain functions to the centers (which may do them better anyway). "We didn't want the staff internally," is one official's explanation for turning over one special program to the service centers. Even if they had wanted them, they might not have gotten them. Putting state money into the service centers may be less controversial in the legislature than putting funds into bigger state bureaucracy. SEA officials also believe that regional cooperatives have more administrative flexibility than they do to carry out state mandates. A recent sate law permits centers to contract directly with the state government, partially as a convenience for the SEA but also as a way of erasing doubts about the propriety of the relationship between the SEA and the centers.

The SEA walks a fine line between using the centers to carry out state programs in local school districts, and protecting the districts' sense of ownership of centers. All of the state officials we interviewed were adamant in supporting the sanctity of local control over education in general and over educational service centers in particular. All felt that centers are excellent vehicles for the state to use for technical assistance, training, and leadership for the districts. All agreed that the SEA should not use the centers for monitoring, compliance, or regulation. As they see it, if the centers took on the regulatory functions of the SEA, they would lose local support. And if they lose local support, they become less useful to the SEA. Thus:

> ...Control items, those are our role... We kept them out in all cases of [regulation]... [T]hey receive grant support from the [SEA], we try hard to not put them in a bind where the districts they serve would view them as something no more than an extension of the [SEA].
>
> ...We never asked and we never plan to ask the service centers to assist us in the policing function... If the [districts] have lost anything recently it's through binding arbitration with the [unions].

Charge that local control of education is eroded by either the SEA or the service center apparatus are vigorously denied. Implicit in these denials is the SEA's defense of its own role in public education. First, SEA officials believe that, regardless of what the service center does on its own or the SEA's behalf, the member towns benefit. One official summarized this nicely: "If they're running a staff development thing, it's for the regional towns in the area or on a state-wide basis, but it has always brought some benefits to the towns... It hasn't been something like, 'Do my job, it has no benefit to these towns.' Most of the things they've done with us in a cooperative compatible kind of way have been to the advantage of the towns that make up the ESC." Another stated that service centers' initiatives, such as JESC's three successful attempts to gain major state financing for the Cottage Street School and the ECA renovations, and for the purchase of the Water Company property, "are reflective of their board of directors and, well, reflective of the districts' needs," and only incidentally compatible with state interests.

Even in the evaluation and certification of centers by the state, district needs play a dominant role. The activities of the centers are supposed to be decided "in conjunction with their local boards of education." The SEA's evaluation simply asks whether the programs exist. If the member districts say, "Here's our program and it is located in our regional center," then the SEA will say, "If those programs have conditions placed upon them by the state...did the center follow through?"

State administrators argue that an overly aggressive service center would be doomed. For example:

> I think center directors are in a precarious position and work as hard as superintendents and all that, but they are not superintendents, and it is not a school district. If the state begins to use it as a school district, then that is when we'll get into trouble... Because the local school districts will see it as the creation of the state, rather than theirs...responding sometimes to state's needs more efficiently than it responds to their own needs.

They suggest that local school districts have sufficient strength to rebuff overzealous service centers or the SEA. This may not be the case. When the districts in another region in Connecticut withdrew support from their educational service center, SEA officials worked very hard to cajole the districts back into line. After months of negotiation and arm twisting by the Commissioner's staff, the ESC was reconstituted. The SEA regarded this as a victory for regional cooperation.

Regional educational service centers have not been much discussed in the General Assembly. The legislature is basically supportive of the centers. Indeed, one legislator told us, "The regional approach is something that has more legislative support than it does local support." The Joint Education Committee has followed the lead of the SEA in acting to strengthen the centers. When the State Board of Education proposed legislation related to the centers, the debate in the committee was perfunctory and the victories on the floor were easy.

Explicit state support for regional cooperation has served the service centers in good stead. Possibly even more important has been the state's move to deinstitutionalize school-aged children and treat them in the public schools. Both the SEA and the legislature have acted to make it difficult for a school district to place children in residential institutions. For example, the formula for state reimbursement of special education costs is weighted to favor towns that serve children outside of institutions. The pressures of this formula reinforce the SEA's regulations about giving priority to placing children in a public school facility, such as JESC. Thus the SEA and the legislature have created powerful incentives for local districts to use the regional centers. These incentives together with basic state certification and financial support have vastly increased the power and legitimacy of the centers.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICTS IN WASHINGTON

A. THE STATE CONTEXT

1. Chronology of Events

1854

The First Territorial Legislature passes Council Bill No. 17, which effectively becomes the first common school law. The office of County Superintendent of Schools is created for the eight existing county jurisdictions. Common schools in each county are created as well. The superintendent is to be popularly elected for a three-year term, supervised by county commissioners, and to be paid no less than $25 per year and no more than $500. The superintendent's responsibilities are to establish and modify school district boundaries, examine and certify teachers, visit all schools annually, write annual reports, apportion school funds, collect school money due to the county, and so on. The superintendent becomes the primary link between the state government and local school districts.

1909

The Legislature revises statutes pertaining to common schools and passes a new general education code. Boards of education for the 39 counties are formed, to be appointed by the county superintendent. The latter is given new regulatory powers and responsibility for supervising the implementation of state education policies. However, no state funds are allocated for these duties.

1955

The Legislature creates popularly elected county boards of education and passes legislation permitting the consolidation of two or more county education units. The required process is so complex that it discourages consolidation.

1956

The Legislature appropriates $700,000 for the county superintendencies, to begin in the 1957-59 biennium. The funds are earmarked for supplemental services to local districts and cooperative programs. As a result, the county superintendency begins to take on a service-oriented role, as opposed to one strictly regulatory in nature. No county consolidations result from the 1955 permissive legislation.

1958

An annual meeting of the county superintendents produces a new consolidation plan calling for 20 county units, as a response to widespread failure at county mergers.

1959

The superintendents and county boards of education draft new legislation to overhaul the 1955 consolidation law. This succeeds as Chapter 216 of the 1959 laws, and requires the State Board of Education (SBE) to submit a new plan for consolidation.

1960

The mandated plan, called the Reynolds Report, is based on the intermediate school district (ISD) structure in other states at the time. It recommends combining the 39 county superintendent offices into 13 multi-county service regions with county participation on a voluntary basis. It is the belief of the committee producing the Report that consolidation of county superintendencies would greatly improve the educational programs available to students in Washington, and promote the equalization thereof. The Report receives the endorsement of the SBE.

Louis Bruno is elected to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) for Washington, effective in 1961.

1961

House Bill 325, designed to enact the spirit and intent of the Reynolds Report, does not pass in the Legislature. Bruno did not expect it to pass, but nevertheless considered the attempt valuable as a way to plant the seeds of a new idea.

1965

The Legislature passes Chapter 139 after renewed efforts by the OSPI, the SBE and county superintendents. It allows school directors (local school board members) in each county to vote whether to create intermediate school districts. County school offices in these new regions can not receive state funds until they have set state-approved service goals. The SBE is required to devise a new statewide plan for service regions. The plan is presented later that year and calls for 15 service areas. At this time, no formal obstacles to inter-LEA cooperation exist, but only cooperatives to serve handicapped children have been set up.

Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in order to improve the quality of public education in the United States. Title III specifically promotes the development of innovative programs and organizations. Local level groups are encouraged to apply for Title III planning grant monies. Regional cooperation receives a new impetus.

1966

Local school directors hold ISD-creation elections in the first half of the year. The elections are a failure, especially in terms of consolidation: of the five ISDs created, only two involve combinations of counties

Figure 1: ISD Election Success (1966)

	ISD Passed	None Passed
Single-county	3	0
Multi-county	2	10

1968

Chapter 139 is perceived to be ineffective. After ordering the OSPI staff to restudy the entire issue in hopes of promulgating consolidation, the SBE relaxes its requirements by permitting sub-service area consolidations, rather than consolidation only on an all or nothing basis. Under these new requirements, several applications for consolidation are received by the OSPI and presented to the SBE in May of 1968.

1969

The permissive Chapter 139 now an assured failure, interested parties combine behind mandatory legislation. Drafted by the Washington Association of County Boards of Education and endorsed by the SBE and the OSPI, the new law mandates the creation of 14 ISDs (including the ones already in existence) and the elimination of county education units. County superintendents are allowed to complete their terms of office.

The Washington Association of School Administrators, in a statement to the SBE, holds that ISDs should not be substitutes for local provision of services. Some county boards and ISD superintendents propose 15 voluntarily created ISDs as an alternative. Employees of county education offices also opposed the bill, fearing job displacement as a result of consolidation. An ad-hoc committee of opposed parties, including representatives of most of the aforementioned groups, then recommends the creation of 18 ISDs. To ameliorate this opposition, Bruno emphasizes that it is the intention of the SBE to periodically review the boundaries of the 14 ISD regions. The bill is signed by the Governor as Chapter 176, Laws of 1969.

1970

The Joint Committee on Education studies ISDs further and recommends the elimination of regulatory, supervisory and quasi-judicial powers carried over from the old county superintendencies.

1971

The Legislature accepts the Committee's recommendations; the SBE votes to endorse them as well. Chapter 282 is passed, embodying not only the Committee's amendments to Chapter 176, but also requiring another study, targeted at ISD future roles and methods of funding.

1972

A state special education law is adopted. This, combined with a much broader definition of "handicapped", adds a large functional area to the ISDs' range of responsibilities. The ISDs' role in the handicapped area varies according to the region it serves -- the differing abilities of the districts to provide their own services. In areas with small districts, the ISD provides grant management, technical assistance, facilitation of cooperatives between local school districts and/or direct provision of a handicap program.

Based on recommendations from the OSPI staff, the SBE consolidates two pairs of ISDs reducing the total number to 12. Three of the five reasons given by the staff are cost-related; an ISD-level merger study committee discounts the estimated savings, citing increased travel expenses and categorical aid cuts that would result from the consolidations.

1973

Dr. Frank B. Brouillet takes over the OSPI and institutes a more collegial decision-making structure, as Bruno goes into semi-retirement. In May, Brouillet requests a study from the ISD superintendents, which will delineate the roles of the OSPI, the ISDs and the LEAs. In November, a resolution from the WASA to the SBE reaffirms the need for such a study.

Rich Boyd of the OSPI Grants Management Section establishes six grant managers in six ISDs. These are hired by Boyd (based on mutual agreement with individual ISD superintendents) as arms of his office, with federal funding, in order to circumvent a state hiring freeze. The six ISDs receiving GMs recognize that Boyd has authority over these people by virtue of his hold on the purse-strings.

1974

A proposal by a committee of ISD superintendents, endorsed by the SBE and forwarded to the SPI for further study, begins to elaborate the ISDs' role in providing services in the areas of curriculum and instruction, special services for the handicapped, finances, professional consultation, adult education, and so on. The study results in Chapter 75. It phases out county funding of ISDs over a five year period, and, during the same time, removes the ISDs from the responsibility of county commissioners and increases their autonomy vis-a-vis county governments.

1975

The number of local school districts has been reduced from 1353 in 1941 to 304, as many smaller districts consolidate and unify.

The continuing opposition to ISDs (focused on the consolidation-boundary issue) garners mixed support from the findings of the Public Education Management Survey, conducted for the State by a task force of private sector management specialists. This report recommends extensive changes to counteract perceived fiscal mismanagement, but most importantly, suggests that the ISDs be reduced in number from 12 to six or eight. The opposition ignores the call for consolidation and focuses on the accusation of mismanagement.

Under fire for some ISDs' mismanagement and receiving threats of defunding from the Legislature, the Finance Section of the OSPI conducts its own comprehensive study of ISDs in Washington. In addition to detailing the services that ISDs provide, the (Dunlap) study addresses the boundaries issue with a thorough review of criteria for setting boundaries.

In a separate move, the Governor vetoes the provision of an appropriations measure which would require the Legislature's consent prior to any SBE alteration of ISD boundaries. Realizing that any decentralization of authority would militate against future consolidation, the Governor refuses to have the SBE's pursuit of cost efficiency hampered by legislative politics.

Chapter 275 follows the recommendations of ISD superintendents and changes the ISD name to Educational Service District (ESD), adding emphasis to the ESDs' service function. Again, this bill contains a measure designed to usurp the SBE's boundary-changing authority. The Governor vetoes that specific provision.

In still another move, HB 526 dies in committee after the Public Education Management Survey is released. This bill would have promoted flexibility by allowing ESDs to provide service to local districts outside their formal boundaries, and would have served as a first draft of a study directed at evaluation and reduction of ESDs, to be completed by the OSPI. Despite the bill's demise, firm commitment to completion of the report is exhibited by the SBE. They are intent upon pursuing further equalization and efficiency of educational programs through consolidation.

1976

The staff of the OSPI defers the responsibility for the SBE-mandated study to a committee appointed in the spring. Represented are various educational interest groups including the Association of Washington School Principals (which Bruno helped found after his retirement from the OSPI), the Washington State School Directors Association, the Association of Educational

Service Districts, the ESD Superintendents, the Washington Federation of Teachers, the Washington Education Association, the Association of Washington Business, the Washington Association of School Administrators, and the Education Committees of the State Senate and House.

At this time a proposal for the future development of ESDs is submitted by an ESD superintendent. It presages many issues that continue to be at the center of the controversy surrounding the ESD system. Among its suggestions are the establishment of three categories of ESDs, to be based primarily on size and expected use. The Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane school districts are each to be recognized as ESDs in their own right. ESD provision of direct services is also suggested. None of the suggestions except the latter is instituted (and that one not until 1981).

The appointed committee reports back to the SBE, echoing the Management Survey's recommendation for a reduction in ESDs from 12 to seven. In reaction, the SBE directs OSPI staff to hold a series of hearings across the state, as required by RCW28A21.020. After the solicitation of considerable public input, through which unanimous opposition to the seven ESD proposal and strong support for ESD services in general is voiced, the OSPI suggests that the ESDs be reduced to nine.

In December, the SBE votes to accept staff recommendations for the consolidation of three more pairs of ESDs and multiple inter-ESD transfers of LEAs, all effective January 1 and to be completed by July 1, 1977.

1977

The consolidation proves difficult to implement, primarily because many highly-placed personnel in the ESDs and LEAs involved are opposed and the time period from decision to implementation is cut; in some cases, the completion date is moved up to January 1, 1977. The drastic shortening of the implementation period magnifies the problems associated with implementation (two superintendents, two boards, two central offices, etc., for each of the three consolidations).

The Legislature amends Chapter 276. This so-called "Educational Service District Core Services Act" affects ESD board member mode of election, the provision of cooperative services, ESD duties and responsibilities in carrying out specific state policies, and devolves authority for any further reduction in the number of ESDs to the affected school directors.

Broadly speaking, the clarified roles and responsibilities include the provision of cooperative and informational services to LEAs, assistance to the OSPI and SBE, and the promulgation of equal educational opportunities across the State. Specific substantive areas include general administration, grant management, special education, budget review, in-service training, and certification/registration services.

Meanwhile, the OSPI attempts to reduce administrative costs for the Traffic Safety Program, a strictly mandated function, through decentralization. Moving some personnel into the ESDs and devolving this function to others who are already there alleviates the OSPI's operational (though not ultimate) responsibility.

1978

Each ESD now acquires a grant manager, as the function is moved under the purview of core services.

1979

The State assumes complete funding of core services to be provided by each ESD, as county funding is phased out by July. In recent years, counties had only been supplying facilities where needed; county programmatic funding had already been eliminated. State funding for the ESDs for the 1979-1981 biennium increased 59% over the previous biennium.

Each ESD now has personnel for gifted education, which had previously been locally funded.

1980

The fiscal crisis rears its head in Washington. Total staffing patterns reflect the budgeting situation as ESD staff peaks in FY 1980-81. Planning during this year is filled with discussion of proposed cuts for the future. The outcome this year is a 16% cut in State funding for ESDs for the 1981-1983 biennium. Basic services are expected to absorb a large share of the cut.

1981

The Legislature establishes guidelines for increasing salaries and compliance mechanisms for these guidelines, increasing the strain on the Financial Services unit of the OSPI. Federal consolidation of education programs results in Chapters One and Two of the ECIA, to be implemented in the coming year.

In a move that reflects continuing opposition to ESD presence by certain groups within the State, the Legislative Budget Committee directs an extensive performance audit of all 9 ESDs and in-depth analyses of two agencies in particular. Two groups prominent in this opposition are school administrators from large districts and small town activists. The former resent having to pay for ESDs that have limited utility to them. The latter view ESDs as arms of the OSPI, and thus, as threats to local autonomy. The study concludes that ESDs generally have a good record of accomplishment, though the two in-depth studies revealed some management problems.

In a related action, core funding categories are collapsed into two areas, paralleling the federal "blocking." Total core funding is slashed, and one-third is to be appropriated by the State, one-third to go to the ESDs from member districts and the final third to be determined through the sale of ESD services, for ESDs with more than 50,000 students (ESDs 101, 112, 113, 121 and

189). The provision of direct services by ESDs is now legalized, though it had been occurring informally for some time. For ESDs with less than 50,000 students (ESDs 105, 114, 123 and 171), the formula used incorporates a greater reliance on the State General Fund, reflecting greater utilization of ESDs by small school districts. This formula includes 50% to be appropriated by the State, 25% from member districts, and 25% garnered through the sale of ESD services. These percentages are for formula purposes and do not reflect percentages of total ESD budgets because other funding sources exist. State formula funding pays for core services but little else (e.g., categorical and cooperative programs, which often make up the vast majority of an ESD's budget). Immediate additional cuts for the present (1981-1983) biennium are made, bringing the total cuts to 28% over the previous biennium.

1982

A bill is proposed by State Senator Metcalf to abolish every vestige of ESD activity. The proposal is a thinly veiled threat in retaliation for what he perceives to be harassment of private schools in his district by the local ESD superintendent. He does not call for any hearings on his bill, thinking its mere introduction is threat enough. It is not pursued by the Legislature.

There has long existed some antipathy by Legislative Republicans towards Superintendent Brouillet, who was a Democrat in the Legislature for many years before being elected to the non-partisan superintendency. The Republicans capitalize on renewed strength in the Legislature to force some changes in the SBE and the OSPI. Effective this year, the SBE is able to hire its own staff and elect its own president. Formerly the SPI was automatically the president and was in charge of staffing the SBE. The Legislature also mandated a streamlining of the OSPI and passed a temporary change in retirement statutes (allowing early retirement just in 1982) to facilitate this.

By the year's end, all these changes result in little change in policy direction, but much shifting of personnel. The OSPI loses more than 30% of its staff, mostly senior people, but the policy-making cadre remains relatively stable. The SBE hires a former Assistant Superintendent who is very close to Brouillet as their Executive Director. The Superintendent is elected by the SBE as its president. So the legislative move to increase the autonomy of the SBE actually has the opposite effect.

1983

Twenty-six local education officials, primarily from large (1st class) districts, file suit in the State Supreme Court over the issue of basic services funding. The plaintiffs seek an expanded definition of "core services" and 100% state funding for the ESDs. First, the plaintiffs maintain that the funding formula making them responsible for one-third of ESD funding is taking money away from local provision of basic services. Second, they advance an "equity" argument, contending that on a per child basis ESD spending is inequitable, citing the difference between ESDs with 300,000 pupils and small ones with less than 50,000 pupils where the local districts pay less and the state pays more of the basic services costs.

request for service. For example, the computerization of the audio-visual program was implemented solely on the initiative of Nova staff.

In both instances, the implementation of new programs depended on the availability of adequate funds. The primary source of funds for program expansion was grant money -- both state and federal -- rather than support from local districts. The availability of grants was a primary determinant of whether a particular policy or program was pursued at any length. The grant process was characterized by an element of "interest group pressure/response" interactive mode of problem-solving, at all levels of government. The federal bureaucracy awarded grants to SEAs and ESDs. SEAs in turn served both as conduits for federal grants and awarded grants of their own. ESDs served as conduits to LEAs for state and federal grants, as well as receiving grants for projects of their own.

During the 1970's, labor made some gains at Nova. For the first time personnel policies concerning workplace safety, sick leave and holidays, union organization and salary standardization were established. Especially in the period between 1973 and 1978, various personnel matters faced by the ESD occupied a not insignificant portion of the staff's agenda. These issues were a signal that haphazard personnel management would no longer do for an organization of this size: the ESD had over 100 personnel at the end of this period. Surprisingly enough, the myriad of labor items was attended by no discernible level of conflict or lasting bitterness, and it did little to disturb this organization.

When Artens first took over the Superintendency, he was determined to tighten up the loose operation run by Remick. Dedicated himself and envisioning a highly innovative organization, the new superintendent had trouble delegating work to his subordinates. But after five years of strong personal control, his leadership style began to accommodate a gradual decentralization of authority.

As time went on, he was able to nurture increasing motivation and dedication among his subordinates. There has always been a high turnover among program personnel, primarily because of the limited lifespan of grants and the contingency of personnel contracts on grant money. As Superintendent, Artens was able to insure that new hirees shared his sense of organizational mission. In the next section, we will take a closer look at personnel management. The important point is here Artens' growing trust in his subordinates as his operational credo was successfully instilled in the ISD staff.

Another force toward decentralization was the ever-increasing size of the ESD. Despite a minor (less than $40,000) budget reduction in 1973 due to cutbacks in grant funding, this 1973-1978 period was one of almost unbridled growth of resources (funding and personnel) and programs. The 1974 budget came very close to $2.5 million -- an increase of over 50% from 1973! Programmatic expansion was as important as resource expansion, and in this area, the ESD was hitting its stride. It had never been a purely administrative framework, but by the mid-1970's, it was running a heady and unanticipated plethora of substantive programs. The programs were as varied as data-processing, education about substance abuse, grant writing and education of handicapped infants. Any one person would have found it literally impossible to cope with the complex, specialized nature of even a fraction of these projects. It was only natural that Artens would delegate authority for many of the agency's tasks.

The third force promoting a less centralized structure was the environment in which the ISD operated. Every ISD must meet the expectations of a varied set of clients. On the local level, this includes the personnel of the member LEAs, as well as the parents of school aged children. Both groups have needs which the ESD must satisfy to operate successfully. The two types of clients interact with the ESD both individually and in various official and unofficial committees. "Upward" communication becomes of utmost importance: the organization must be able to perceive the needs of its clients if it is to respond. Most of Nova's clients were dealing with Artens' subordinates, especially the program personnel. Artens saw that as Nova continued its expansion beyond a administrative mechanism, the need for communication at a less centralized level would only increase. Devolving authority for making decisions would increase the responsiveness of the organization as a whole. In the next section, we will devote further attention to this decentralization.

The next period in the agency's history began with its consolidation with ISD Alpha in 1977 to create ESD West. Although some of the personnel management problems of the intermediate era persisted through 1978, the principal problems in 1977 and 1978 grew out of the consolidation rather than the earlier era. Although both ESDs contained large school districts, overall, Perry County was more rural than Witkin county. Alpha was much less innovative than Nova. Merging two different ISDs would have been difficult in any event. It was made more difficult because the consolidation was the result of a rushed implementation of a policy forced from above. The staff of both ISDs were vehemently opposed to the consolidation; they did not cooperate when it came to agreeing on standardized labor policies (e.g., Nova's staff had generally higher salaries and was not willing to take any pay cuts). With the help of an outside consultant, consistent policies were eventually worked out, with formal resolution delayed until 1980.

Other problems accompanied the consolidation, but none that persisted for more than a few years. The consolidation originally caused some bad feelings among West's local clients. The governing boards of the two ISDs were combined to form the ESD West board. This process created some bitterness, as Alpha's board members wanted the Alpha superintendent to direct ESD West. One of Alpha's members defected during the heated election session, and Artens was elected superintendent, by a vote of 8-6. The LEAs in Perry County were upset because their financial contributions were paying for various Nova programs that they had no part in originating. For this reason and because they viewed the consolidation as politically motivated -- merging two units with large numbers of students did not seem efficient to the local people, and there were many who believed that the consolidation was part of a plot by the SPI to further his influence throughout the state -- many of the large district superintendents dragged their feet during the consolidation. They had had a "live and let live" relationship with Alpha's superintendent. Their fear that Artens was going to rock the boat contributed to their lack of cooperation with him during and immediately following the consolidation.

Alpha's superintendent remained in charge of one program on a limited one year contract. Artens shed light on another facet of what he termed "a shotgun merger:"

> I found out through other people in the local districts that he [Alpha's superintendent] was sowing seeds of discontent. He was saying this about Stu Artens, and this about his operation, and so forth, and his leadership, and the management, and so on. This made it extremely difficult...

Over the next few years, however, Artens' management of ESD West proved the detractors wrong, and the antipathy dissipated. His strategy was wholly service-oriented. He minimized the appearance of what little regulating he was required by the State to undertake. He remembers his line of argument to the LEAs in Perry County.

> ..[we] aren't coming in here to try to tell you how to run your operation; all we want to do is try to meet your needs.

By directing the ESD to respond to the perceived needs of clients, Artens was able to persuade local administrators that they were getting better service out of ESD West than they had received from Alpha.

ESD West had barely begun to fully recover from the shock of the consolidation when the period of fiscal stress conduced new problems. The funding formula revisions passed by the Legislature in 1981 were the result of a legislative compromise between the opponents and proponents of the ESD network. Basically, the new formula says that if ESDs are necessary to LEAs, then these LEAs should share the burden of their funding. Taking the core appropriations and dividing it into fractions, the legislature mandated that the LEAs were either directly or indirectly responsible for 50% of the core funding (small ESD regions) or 2/3 of the funding (large ESD regions). Half of each of these fractions was voluntary, and the ESDs knew that such voluntary payments would not be forthcoming. Nevertheless the legislation effected an immediate large cut in ESD revenue (e.g., 1/4 to 1/3 of their core appropriations). The core services act increased the dependency of West on its constituent LEAs, while simultaneously arousing opposition in those LEAs. This effectively reduced the discretion of the superintendent to decide on policy directions. The early 1980's also brought funding reductions from the federal and state level. Federal grant monies were cut back. Not only were state grant monies reduced, but core service appropriations were also cut back. Almost as detrimental, the OSPI shifted some of its regulatory burden onto the ESD framework, and this required a shift in West's resource distribution as well as increasing the LEAs' opposition. Two of the largest areas where this occurred were in the monitoring of student transportation and special education regulations.

For most ESDs, core funding was not a large portion of their total revenue. The formula was based primarily on the number of second class districts in an ESD region, on the assumption that ESDs with many small districts were providing more core services. Thus, the ESDs in more rural and sparsely populated areas suffered less severe cuts than larger ESD regions serving urban and suburban districts. For ESD West, core funding was less than 10% of its revenues, but it provided an administrative framework through which the other 90% could be pursued. An ESD as innovative as West needs a "core" of funds in order to generate new funding.

Another casualty of fiscal stress was the acclaimed substance abuse education program. Under the leadership of an extremely competent and innovative program manager, the program had received international recognition. Under the conditions of fiscal stress present in the 1980's, this program was endangered. It relied on reimbursements from state and federal grants that often arrived months after expenses were incurred. When Stuart Artens advised the program manager to drop some of its sub-programs to ameliorate this problem, the manager became quite frustrated with the limitations of operating through a public agency. Catching everyone in ESD West by surprise, he resigned. He started his own private corporation, hired a majority of his subordinates from the ESD, and negotiated new contracts to run the program with the original grantors and the LEAs receiving the services.

After the departure of the drug education program in early 1982, Artens retired. Michael Gowing was hired to succeed him. This choice was significant in several respects. First, an outsider was chosen for the top position, breaking the tradition of hiring insiders who moved up through the organization. Second, Artens had been anti-OSPI, both by his own admission and from the description of observers. Gowing had no such antipathy; in fact, he had worked closely with the OSPI in the past, and he retained the admiration of both the SBE and the OSPI. Third, he had worked as a consultant for several LEA superintendents in the West area, and was respected by them. This was also a change from Artens, who had been resented by some members of the Superintendents Advisory Committee (SAC) for not soliciting their opinions before taking action.

Most observers, including Artens, think that the future of ESD West is dependent upon its leadership. Assuming this is true, Gowing seems to have many positive attributes, including the support of key groups in ESD West's environment.

3. Internal Management

In this section we look at the general organizational processes that support West's educational functions. Underlying the entire analysis will be attention to the resource constraints under which the ESD must operate. The organizational processes of ESD West can be viewed from three different perspectives, with some overlap: the general management atmosphere, personnel management and the organizational credo.

Although Artens intended to tighten up the operation of this agency when he succeeded Remick, the passage of more than a decade has actually resulted in an organization whose general atmosphere is often quite loose. The major exception is the sense of organizational mission that has been inculcated in the staff. Dedication is a difficult quality to measure. But if impressions mean anything, the program personnel are *fully* committed to Artens' motto: 'soar and explore.'

An innovative style was translated by Artens to mean flexibility, often at the cost of procedures that would improve organizational outcomes. An anti-paperwork bias is evident throughout the organization -- even the assistant superintendent spontaneously mentioned it:

> ...one of our guidelines on paperwork is if you're not going to absolutely use the paper in a crucial decision, then don't collect it.

If more emphasis had been put on paperwork, the contracts used in the drug and alcohol abuse education program might have been scrutinized more carefully to avoid the loopholes that permitted the manager to engineer the wholesale departure of his program.

In pursuing funding, stability of the source is not taken into account. Of course, a certain amount of this is endemic to ESD West's dependency on grants. Even in the pursuit of grants, however, the time horizon is completely ignored as a criterion. Grants are pursued for a variety of other reasons (e.g. LEA benefit, publicity, etc.), but resource stability plays no part in the decision concerning grant applications. One highly-placed administrative officer of West suggested that even if they knew a certain grant would "dry up" in six months, they would still want it. Aside from the principle of funding stability, one has to question whether exposing clients to a certain service, then having it vanish shortly thereafter, is in the best long-run interests of those clients.

Although funding instability is the most important constraint for this agency, not to be underestimated in importance is personnel instability. For ESD West the two are inextricably related: people are hired contingent upon receipt of grants, and when the grants dry up the people move on. Core funding only pays for a limited number of administrative personnel. Aside from the core staff, the only continuing programs are health education (substance abuse) and gifted education. These are the only two program units capable of predictably garnering grants.

If the ESD does not devote sustained attention to creating stable programs, the staff does spend considerable energy on getting publicity for the agency. The assistant superintendent went on at length about the importance of publicity for one of his recent programmatic innovations. Good public relations are essential for an organization operating in an environment like ESD West. The majority of West's funding relies on clientele use of various cooperative programs, and the concomitant subscription fees. But, despite the importance of publicity, the continual pursuit of programs with publicity as the primary goal may not serve the long-run interests of the organization.

Another important quality of West's structure is the role served by core funding. This funding -- from two different sources, by three different methods -- is only a small fraction of West's total budget. But the importance of this funding is not equivalent to its percentage. The core funding is really the lifeblood of West, because the administrative framework it pays for is the skeleton of the agency. The assistant superintendent described it in a manner consistent with the medical metaphor:

> ...that core [funding] is what keeps it all alive. If that core dies, then all the rest of it is going to die.

The distribution of authority in the ESD has shifted toward the program directors. The results of this trend are apparent at two levels: the top leadership and the programmatic level. When Artens assumed his position at the top of the agency's hierarchy, he made decisions autocratically. During the intermediate period, he created a "cabinet" of the top four people: the director of curriculum and instruction (the assistant superintendent), finance and personnel, media services and special services. He now formulates policy with these people at meetings which occur at least once per month. The program personnel receive much more authority than they had previously held. The subunits operate with great autonomy, and within most, the structure is fairly collegial (partly because most subunits are quite small). The subunits have the power to design new programs, modify existing ones, pursue grants from both private and public sources, and to select new personnel, all with only the most cursory approval from Artens or anyone else in the organization.

Fiscal monitoring is the most centralized of any organizational process in the ESD. This is primarily because the OSPI requires the agency to keep a close watch over its finances. But even in this process the monitoring (and centralization) is not extreme, as the director of finances and her accountant don't keep a close watch on the internal dynamics of West; they are more concerned with what is required by OSPI. For instance, the director was unable to find several internal budget documents requested of her. The innate unpredictability of grant funding mandates a flexible approach by the monitors. For example, the personnel in one gifted education subunit termed the monitoring "a necessary limitation," but not an onerous one.

Program personnel are normally hired by the subunit, not by the central office. The people in a particular program know best what they need, and can look for someone with specific attributes. If Artens did the interviewing, he would not only know little about the substantive areas, but he would also be limited by an inflexible, possibly irrelevant, job description. All the personnel, both program and administrative, look for aggressive and innovative people, like themselves. The program personnel also look for a strong commitment to the particular program area. No one wants to hire someone who "sits around waiting for the phone to ring." The administration likes their agency personnel to be visible out in the local districts --another strategy for good public relations. As the assistant superintendent put it, they look for independent people who can handle a lot of dynamic task variability.

This system has significant consequences for the organization as a whole, especially concerning organizational loyalty. In the case of ESD West, high turnover has both good and bad aspects. Constantly changing personnel makes it easier for the organization to innovate, and "new blood" can add to the morale of the organization and the effectiveness of the particular program. At the same time, the turnover militates against the building of organizational loyalty, which usually takes time. This touches upon another point which is even more important. Although the indoctrination of new personnel with the operational credo of West is successful -- primarily through selective recruitment rather than direct inculcation -- the the organizational mission promotes loyalty not to the organization as a whole, but to particular programs. The decentralized structure, the hiring methods and the recruitment targets all reinforce an aura of innovation. But these organizational components promote commitment to specific programs, rather than to the success of ESD West. Some program personnel talk of remaining with a certain project area, even though it will mean leaving this agency. This, in fact, happens quite often; West sometimes moves a project into one of its constituent LEAs because of funding restrictions. Other workers have moved across the state or into the private sector in order to continue their pursuit of a specific program area (the exit of the health education project is an obvious example).

"Soar and explore," the organizational credo of West, conveys similar advantages and disadvantages. The organizational structure and processes that bring this motto to life are not conducive to the promotion of organizational loyalty.

This agency is operated in such a way that dependable, capable and extremely motivated people are essential to its success. This is much more the case here than would be in a tighter, more pyramidal organization. But chronic fiscal instability of the organization must also shape the activities of program personnel. The staff must spend at least some of their time looking for new sources of funds. While this, in and of itself, is not deleterious, it has that potential if fund raising begins to crowd out their primary objective: the program they are to operate effectively. Worry over funding is also likely to result in an element of dissatisfaction on the part of staff (again, recall the exit of the health education project). In our observation of this ESD, however, all these disadvantages were outweighed by the motivation and enthusiasm engendered by the autonomy, freedom, and opportunities for innovation.

A structural problem was suggested by one ESD Board member. The decentralized structure and consequent autonomy of the programs militate against efficient communication. She was concerned that Artens did not know what was going on in his organization. As a result, the Board often heard about events later than they would have liked. A West staff member also brought up communication processes, this time focusing on internal problems. This worker observed that the structure of the organization fostered a redundancy whereby two staff members might be doing the same task and they would not know it -- wasting valuable time and creating frustration.

The advantages of a 'soar and explore' philosophy and its concomitant organizational components are fairly straightforward. The situation promotes innovation and commitment (albeit, to specific programs). It also is very conducive to the expansion of the organization. The structure and the commitment of the personnel promote the retention of a local perspective. Both staff members and LEA members noted the viewpoint and responsiveness of the personnel.

The internal management of ESD West promotes the identification and satisfaction of its needs, both reactively and proactively. In our study, the two modes will not differ as much as in some other organizations because of the resource constraints under which the ESD operates. The core services formula and the cooperative programs that comprise the bulk of its funding both mandate a significant dependency by the ESD on its local clients. Thus, the setting and seeking of goals involve more interaction with the clientele groups than a private organization with a less limited set of (potential) clients. The consequences of 'soar and explore' relevant in this case are decentralized managers who possess both the requisite authority and proximity to respond to local needs. The distinct subunits can pursue funding, initiate programs and hire new personnel. They also maintain enough direct contact with their clients to be highly cognizant of the needs of those clients. But the very qualities that promote the identification and satisfaction of needs allow the various subunits to be responsive to different stimuli. Some react to local (clientele) needs, some to pressure groups, some to the availability of funding, and some react primarily to the need to advance the agency as an organization. The fact that most program personnel are loyal to their particular subunit, rather than the organization as a whole should suggest that the only group reacting to the last stimulus -- the advancement of West -- is located high up in the organization. This is consistent with the work done by organization theorists focusing on public organizations. And it is consistent with the interview responses of West staff members. For instance, the director of one of the cooperatives said that he was primarily responsive to local needs, while Artens must be responsive to the needs to advance West as an organization.

The dynamics of the reactive mode, though, are typified by the more numerous program personnel who also possess substantial day-to-day decision-making authority. In their case, we can characterize the stimulus-response pattern as one of upward transference: local people (parents, teachers or local school directors) convey their desire to the ESD contact in their LEA (a variety of personnel including principals and special education directors), who then convey the need to the relevant subunit in the ESD. This is a typical pattern preceding the initiation of a new program, although there are situations in the reactive mode which vary from this pattern.

West also operates in a proactive mode, although observation suggests that the organizational characteristics of West are more suited to the reactive mode. The proactive mode is more likely to operate when a major innovation or deviation from existing programs or policies is pursued, like the drug education program begun in 1972.

The internal goal-setting and evaluation exercises of West are institutionalized, but their impact is questionable because they are so informal and so loosely integrated into the other operating processes of the ESD. One worker even termed the short question-and-answer period between herself and Artens as "a joke." Moreover, these events have no discernible impact on either the personnel or the funding areas; no sanctions for inadequate performance are ever instituted. Since there is no overarching organizational strategy, the programmatic goal-setting and internal evaluation procedures have no relationship to other programs, or the organization as a whole.

Internal evaluations and goal-setting exercises at the subunit program level are practically non-existent. This might be related to the size of most of these subunits -- between one and five people -- such that the missing processes may be implicit rather than explicit.

Each program varies in the amount and kind of support it needs from the upper levels of the agency. One end of the spectrum may be defined by the

Traffic Safety program, consisting of one regional coordinator who doesn't serve LEAs within West's boundaries. She feels a primary allegiance to this ESD because of her location, but she requires little from the agency other than some administrative support. At the other end of the spectrum is the Head Start program which serves children in 10 LEAs within West's boundaries. The director of this program termed the leadership proffered by the ESD important. The superintendent elicits support from other subunits within West (e.g. to get films from the Audio-visual cooperative) and from the Superintendents' Advisory Council. Artens' philosophy and 'open-door' policy promote the process in those cases where the proactive mode is instituted.

In conclusion, we might suggest that the 'soar and explore' philosophy promotes internal change. The internal change in turn promotes external change -- innovation in West's immediate local environment.

Could a different set of organizational components work in a similar, and perhaps more successful manner? Well, a more centralized structure might have two objectives as its goals: a more efficient distribution of core money through tighter top-level control and tighter control of non-core grant projects, including personnel. Neither of these objectives seems realistic. Since core funding pays for only 10% of the ESD personnel and even less of the total West budget, the impact of any alteration in its distribution (not nat level) would be minimal. More than this, the positions it presently funds could not reasonably be deleted (i.e., accountants, curriculum director, superintendent, etc.). Tighter programmatic control seems impossible because of the limitations on the expertise of any superintendent. More control in the absence of any overall organizational strategy not only contradicts Artens' philosophy (to 'soar and explore' would be tough on a leash), but is likely to alienate program personnel and to depress their aggressive and creative commitment to their programs.

The en masse departure of the drug education program provided a test of the internal management of ESD West. First, we might expect the ESD to respond by instituting tighter monitoring of the contracts between the West program subunits and their drug program staff. It was the specifics of the contracts which allowed the drug program staff to cancel and then sign back up with the private consulting firm. Whether West will choose to do this under the new superintendent remains to be seen. But the remaining personnel within West view the series of events as a fluke: a product of the superior abilities of the drug program manager combined with the financial limitations of the organization. It is possible that a tighter, more centralized structure may simply have led to an earlier withdrawal of that program. However, this predominant view of the agency's staff does not bode well for organizational learning.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

In this section, we focus on the interaction between the ESD and its constituent LEAs. Specifically we look at how the LEAs evaluate ESD performance and how they make their influence felt.

The evaluation framework can be usefully divided into formal and informal mechanisms. The formal mechanisms are numerous. Yearly forms from the ESD ask the LEA to evaluate the services they receive from West. The cooperative programs have a built in mechanisms similar to a private organization that sells services: if LEAs participate the program is perceived to be doing well. This mechanism is problematic, as the director of the information systems subunit noted: LEAs may cancel subscriptions for a variety of reasons. Interpreting a cancellation as a negative evaluation is akin to interpreting electoral victory as carte blanche approval of all one's policies. The various programs in the curriculum and instruction unit use formal interviews, as well, to evaluate their services. The special education programs have perhaps the most intensive formal evaluative mechanisms in the ESD, partly because of the strong legal mandate (both state and federal) they possess, and partly because of the strong commitment these personnel have to improve their services if at all possible. Not only do the personnel meet with parents of children in these programs, but they have separate evaluation questionnaires in addition to the general agency forms. As one of the LEA special education directors described the situation, West is almost continually evaluating their services.

Informally, Artens receives feedback from LEA superintendents via his SAC. The ESD Board members also provide some input to Artens. The Board has formal authority over West, but both the Board and the SAC are primarily reactive when it comes to dealing with the superintendent. The SAC members refuse to characterize their body as a rubber stamp, but they did express some bitterness that Artens often came to them with faits accomplis. When Artens seeks input from them, it is more in their role as clients, than as educational professionals. Board members, on the other hand, have little professional expertise and they were fairly satisfied with their role vis-a-vis Artens.

The Board has recently tightened up its monitoring of personnel service contracts, even to the point of re-negotiating the contract of the person (outside the ESD) who invests West's cash surpluses. This stricter monitoring has developed in the last four or five years. It will undoubtedly continue to increase because of the shock the Board received from the departure of the substance abuse program. Some of the Board members do not have much contact with the LEAs in their districts, but others pursue local contact through dinners and meetings. These members then transmit feedback they elicit from LEA personnel to Artens at meetings of the ESD Board and in ad-hoc conversations.

These mechanisms are directed towards the top leadership of the agency, but much informal evaluation occurs in direct interaction of local stuff with program personnel, through conversations and meetings. Some programs have regular meetings scheduled, others have them on an as-needed basis. These meetings occur as often as twice per month, and though they aren't primarily evaluative in character, much evaluation does occur.

The actual evaluation of West's services does not seem as strict as its importance would dictate. The programs most often noted as the most successful were the audio-visual cooperative, the drug education project (many LEAs were upset by its privatization because of the increased prices it was going to charge), and most of the special education programs. But the evaluations seemed to be based more on reputation than any strict, well-defined criteria. As far as a large LEA vs. small LEA dichotomy was concerned, it was best summarized by the superintendent of Lewis. He was quite positive in his overall evaluation of West, but distinguished between the "assistance role" the ESD played vis-a-vis large LEAs and the "essential role" that West had for small ones. However internal monitoring of phone calls by West staff supported the ESD leadership's claim that large LEAs use the agency's services as much as small ones. As one staff member said:

> I've heard that said over and over again, particularly by the Legislature: "The big districts don't need the services of an ESD" and I'll say it on tape, Bullshit! That's ridiculous. ... I've spent more time in [a nearby, large district] over the past two years than I have in any district. That's not because they need the help, it's because they want to get better and better and better. With some [of the small districts], I will not be there nearly as frequently.

Much of the formal evaluation takes place between high level administrative personnel, while it is the program personnel in the LEAs that actually use the services of the agency. Use of ESD services often takes the form of phone calls between LEA program personnel (not superintendents) and ESD program personnel. Because these program personnel don't usually inform their superiors about these contacts - no one likes to admit they needed help - the superintendents aren't normally aware of the extent of their own LEA's use of West. This is more common in larger LEAs, where the superintendents are more removed from their program personnel.

A last point that provides positive evaluation of West is less tangible. This is variety of "roles" the agency plays for LEAs which do not constitute direct service delivery. Repeated mentions of these roles and their value were offered by personnel in both large and small LEAs. The roles include: 1) provider of an outside perspective, 2) provider of a network of coordination, 3) provider of encouragement, especially the encouragement of innovation within LEAs, and 4) provider of a forum for concerned personnel to communicate about common problems. The director of special education in the large, urban Lewis LEA stated that the outsider perspective provided by ESD West is invaluable. With the workload he experiences, he often loses his perspective, and ESD personnel can often help immensely. The director of curriculum in the same district suggested that the ESD was a big help in brokering services. The special education director for a medium-sized LEA commented on the willingness of West to help them start their own version of a program previously provided by West:

> ...they've always been, as long as I operated with them, and it's been a long time now, they have always been encouraging, in a system type of role.

ESD West helped them with a project to serve handicapped pre-schoolers at home and to provide audiological services. The agency also provides in-service training, which increases the ability of LEAs to serve their students on their own. Lastly, ESD's forum role is well-known throughout its region. One example is the monthly meetings for all the special education directors that West holds every month. There, professionals dealing with similar problems can benefit from each other's expertise and experiences. These meetings are also an opportunity for OSPI personnel to inform the LEAs about new regulations or available grants.

Overall, the impact of West, judging by the evaluations of LEA personnel, is both significant and overwhelmingly positive. It is interesting to note that program personnel were always very enthusiastic about West, while some superintendents said they could survive without it.

Through these mechanisms, the LEAs do influence the goals of the ESD. As we suggested in the preceding section, West has an organizational layout that promotes responsiveness to local concerns. This effectively limits the significance of the proactive mode for West and renders it an organization very attuned to its environment. Because of this, the ability of the LEAs to influence the ESD is very high; we must remember that this is largely a function of the resource constraints under which West operates.

The mechanisms by which LEAs set goals for the agency are similar or identical to the evaluative mechanisms. There is a yearly needs assessment done by all programs. Additional goal-setting surveys are done occasionally. The ESD Board and the SAC are usually reactive rather than proactive, but they occasionally take some initiative in goal-setting. This occurs more often with the SAC because they are actual clients of West and also because they have more accumulated expertise than the Board members. Many working committees have also been institutionalized in a variety of program areas to facilitate the ability of West to perceive local needs. These committees are made up of program personnel from the ESD and the LEAs. More informal mechanisms are also utilized by LEAs and their use is encouraged by the ESD. Phone calls and contacts at a variety of meetings are the primary methods. LEA personnel perceive the ESD personnel as very responsive in these informal contacts.

In conclusion, we offer one piece of evidence attesting to the effectiveness of the LEAs' influence: only one of the LEA respondents interviewed suggested a program that he felt was necessary but hadn't been provided for his districts (a transportation cooperative).

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

In the relationship between the ESD and the state, the Legislature has some influence, but the OSPI is the major player. The Legislature plays a more general role. It influences life for all the ESDs, without interacting much with any single ESD on a one-to-one basis. ESD West does lobby the Legislature, using two organizations for this purpose: the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) and the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA). Both the superintendent and his assistant manage this type of political activity. The program people also urge the LEA personnel whom they service to contact their local legislators in support of ESD West, as well as urging them to contact the OSPI.

In some ways ESD West possesses a certain "flagship" status with the OSPI because of its size and expertise. This has resulted in a close formal relationship between the two organizations. For example, the OSPI placed one of four regional Traffic Safety Coordinators at ESD West, even though the coordinator serves no LEAs in this ESD. The OSPI has placed other State personnel at West.

On the other hand, most of the contacts with the OSPI go through Artens, who is somewhat antagonistic towards the state agency. Partly this may be the result of personality differences, partly the demographics of this ESD region. Artens believes that the OSPI, especially Dr. Brouillett, is too political, that the consolidation of Nova and Alpha was a political power-play, and that the ESD funding formula discriminates against West. State officials, in turn, have reservations about ESD West; many expressed some relief at Artens' retirement. The influence of the OSPI on West's policy directions is ad hoc because of the strained relationship. Occasionally OSPI personnel will suggest something new that the ESD will implement. OSPI personnel are in frequent contact with West program people, usually to consult them on issues like fiscal monitoring.

The OSPI evaluates ESD West in a traditional, institutionalized pattern. Fiscal monitoring and special education compliance checks bring the two agencies into regular contact. West staff members tend to take the local district perspective in their interactions with LEAs and the OSPI. Most of the other evaluation is ad hoc, often politically motivated. For example, in 1975 the release of the Public Education Management Survey turned enough legislators against the ESD network to result in the defeat of a bill to increase the flexibility of the ESDs by allowing them to provide services to LEAs outside their formal boundaries. The Survey concluded that the ESDs were not managed well and in some cases suffered from irregular and incompetent management practices.

C. ESD EAST

1. Chronology of Events

1969

House Bill 419 abolishes the office of county superintendent and the county school district jurisdiction throughout the state as of January, 1971. ISD East is one of 14 ISDs established. It covers many rural and sparsely populated counties. Over 80% of the new region's student population reside within one urban center, Leland, and its suburbs in Waters County. Lee Wilson, the superintendent of Waters County, opposes the creation of the ISD. His views in the local press reflect those of other urban county superintendents: ISD boards composed of one representative per county violate the one-man-one-vote rule.

In July, East's board holds its first meeting. The board is made up of one school director from each of the seven counties. Wilson is chosen as ISD superintendent with an initial two year contract. East's headquarters are established in a Waters County building.

The ISD Board takes possession of the county superintendents' files and records, considers a series of satellite offices in areas where county superintendents still hold office, reviews the budgets of small districts, fills school director vacancies, and draws up program goals and objectives.

New hires and part-time personnel on assignment from several LEAs bring East's staff to nearly one dozen in number. Double entry bookkeeping is adopted. The agency considers various personnel policies, and a salary schedule is set.

1970

East acquires Waters County's highly touted audio-visual program.

The agency's 1970-71 budget is set at $15,000. Nearly half of this is derived from mandated county contributions.

A program and personnel policy booklet is drafted by East's staff for Board consideration.

East's mandated Regional Advisory Council (RAC), made up of representative superintendents from local school districts, establishes a set of objectives for the agency, to be approved by the Board. A local university is asked to survey local school needs and potential areas for ISD services.

1971

In February, a sub-committee of the RAC recommends the following rules and roles for East: (a) provide cooperative services only when local districts can not meet the need acting alone, (b) provide only services that can be evaluated, (c) secure funds from the state for mandated services, (d) use non-categorical funds for region-wide services only, (e) structure East along functional lines, (f) establish regular communications between the Board and the RAC, and (g) use fees, dues and assessments wherever possible to fund programs. In March, the East Board debates the RAC's recommendations, but decides against officially endorsing them.

A uniform salary schedule, based on the Leland School District's salary schedule, is adopted.

County superintendencies have now ceased to exist, as stipulated in HB 419. Each ISD must choose a seven or nine member Board make-up. The Board opts for seven. Each member will represent a director district and will be elected by voters residing within that district. Each director district is drawn along lines that contain roughly equal shares of the ISD region's total population.

In the fall, local superintendents in East's region form a chapter of the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA).

The RAC suggests to the Board that the Leland-based salary schedule is too high, and recommends a median schedule in its place. The Board rejects this suggestion.

1972

East's 1972-73 budget is set at $1.8 million.

Four new areas of services to local districts are established: cooperative purchasing, in-service training for district personnel, curriculum development, and expanded learning materials services.

1973

Louis Cator succeeds Lee Wilson as the new East Superintendent. Cator and other ISD superintendents meet with the Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a clearer understanding of ISD-OSPI roles and relationships.

East revises its program and personnel policy handbook to reflect new rules on travel, vacations, sick leave, and worker evaluation.

The agency's 1973-74 budget is $2 million.

1974

In the spring, East moves to a commercial building in Leland.

New services are developed in the areas of data-processing, student testing, scheduling, grading and tracking. The data-processing program hooks up to a state-funded data-processing system housed in another ISD.

The Board begins holding its regular monthly meetings in each of the counties on a rotating basis, instead of in Waters County all of the time.

An OSPI feasibility study suggests that East should be the location for housing one of several state student transportation coordinators.

East, together with many other ISDs, makes several recommendations to the SBE: change the name of ISDs to Regional Educational Service Agencies; give ISD employees the same benefits as state employees; abolish popularly-elected ISD boards and replace them with superintendent-elected bodies; and have the SBE establish standard position classifications across all ISDs. Over the next few years, legislation approximating the first three suggestions will pass.

East's 1974-1975 budget is $2.2 million, much of it coming from state and federal grants.

1975

In the Spring, East adopts an affirmative action policy.

Cator joins with other ISD superintendents in objecting to the OSPI's proposed consolidation of ISDs from 12 to 9.

In the fall, Cater dies suddenly of a heart attack. Len Kerwin, long-time East assistant superintendent becomes acting superintendent.

Kerwin and other ISD superintendents promote ISDs as primary providers of financial and special education services. ISD East becomes Educational Service District East.

Kerwin and his executive staff begin a series of annual visits to each county to present a "dog and pony show," which describes ESD services and responsibilities, as well as seeks local feedback on ESD operations.

The 1975-1976 ESD East budget comes to almost $2.9 million.

1976

The East Board appoints Kerwin as ESD superintendent.

During the following months, policies on employee membership in professional associations, personnel file storage, benefit deductions and performance evaluations are established or updated. Shortly thereafter, the Board tightens employee travel privileges, after perceived abuses, and establishes procedures for employee grievances.

The 1976-1977 East budget is set at $3.4 million.

1977

Four LEAs served by a neighboring ESD express the desire to join East, and do so with SBE approval. Director district boundaries are redrawn to include the new districts.

Senate Bill 2810 establishes school director-elected ESD boards. All East Board members must run for re-election.

Due to changes in unemployment compensation rulings affecting the entire state system of public education, ESD East is faced with taxing the incomes of LEA employees or designing an unemployment insurance cooperative for local districts. They choose the latter.

The Board reacts favorably to the state's proposed core services funding formula because it favors ESDs, like East, with large numbers of districts with fewer than 2,000 students, called second-class districts.

The budget for 1977-1978 is $3.5 million. East now employs 72 people.

1978

The East Board approves new program goals and objectives, stressing expanded services in all areas of special education, general education, and fiscal management. A cooperative special education program is created, at the cost of $1.25 per student. A grants management cooperative is proposed.

Policies on sick leave and compensatory time are updated.

A proposed closure of the Simmsburg satellite office meets stiff opposition from residents of that area. The Board relents, and the office is funded for one more year.

The 1978-1979 budget tops $5 million, and staff totals 84 people.

1979

Kerwin and Marvin Porter, assistant superintendent, request that the Board evaluate their performance. The Board begins a lengthy re-evaluation of all personnel policies.

Cooperatives for a testing accounting, and remediation begin. East now provides several services in special education, including school psychologists, arts for the handicapped, occupational and physical therapy, and programs for communication disorders and pre-school handicapped children.

The 1979-1980 budget totals $6.2 million, and the staff now numbers 101.

1980

New performance evaluation forms and schedules are introduced for classified and certificated employees, resulting from the Superintendent's request to be evaluated. The Board places further restrictions on staff travel to conferences at agency expense.

East starts a new cooperative so that ash damage from Mt. St. Helens can be assessed.

A state audit claims East is at fault for using separate fund accounts for its large cooperative purchasing program.

The continuing yearly visits by East's senior management to county areas reveal few criticisms of East's programs. Most complaints by district personnel are levelled at the OSPI.

The 1980-1981 budget is set a $6.4 million, while staff continues to increase to 116.

1981

A change in state code provides much needed relief to cash flow problems by permitting separate accounts for the cooperative purchasing program.

The new formula for state funding of ESDs threatens to create serious shortfalls for East if local districts do not pay their share. In a major move to cut costs, consolidate management of several programs, and fill the forced staff vacancies and retirements, the agency reorganizes into two divisions. Educational Services and Special Services become Special Programs. Fiscal Services remains intact.

A new salary schedule for each of East's three classes of employees is proposed after considerable debate by the Board.

Kerwin retires on a medical disability. Porter becomes superintendent. Porter and other ESD superintendents urge local school district personnel to contact legislators about the serious consequences of the revised funding formula. The effort produces much support for East, even from the largest districts. Porter and senior staff negotiate innovative credit, in-kind and barter agreements with larger districts as a means to reduce the districts' mandated contributions to East while still maintaining the agency's solvency.

The 1981-1982 budget is $7.6 million, but staff levels decrease to 92 people.

1982

There are increased efforts to reduce and/or cut programs. Porter announces his retirement, effective in the Summer. The 1982-1983 budget is $6.8 million with a staff of 110 employees.

2. History

The creation of ESD East paralleled that of ESD West in that it was imposed from above without any strong local support, at least at the outset. There were no outstanding needs voiced by lower level personnel, either in the LEAs or the county superintendencies. First of all, local officials were largely ignorant of any potential resources that might be gained through concerted action. Second, some cooperatives already existed. There were cooperative programs for handicapped children throughout the region, and some fairly sophisticated services in the one urban county in the region, Waters County. There also existed a predecessor to East's audio-visual cooperative, in the form of library vans. These travelled around the northern sections of what is presently ESD East to collect and redistribute books and maps to the small rural schoolhouses that were common in this part of Washington. This cooperative program was started by a forward-thinking county superintendent who saw that each school would be able to purchase only a handful of new books every year. In another cooperative effort, Markham County coordinated the management of Title I grants. The cooperative grant process was so successful that when the ESD took over the process in 1969, it hired the Markham staff who ran it.

Time and again the makeup of this geographic region determined the scope of East's operations. The region is in the eastern section of the state, where farms and one-room schoolhouses were common. Of the ESD's many counties, only one was predominantly urban, Waters County which contained Leland, a large city by Washington's standards. The majority of the school districts in East's region are quite small. More than 80% are second class districts, meaning that they have fewer than 2000 students. In fact, many districts have fewer than 500 students. In these 2nd class districts, the superintendent is often the only administrative staff member in the district. As a result, the superintendents do everything from budgeting to the coordination of special education programs. They are "jacks-of-all-trades," with little substantive expertise in any of the areas they are expected to manage. They obviously could use help. But one of the qualities of the rural area east of the Cascades is that, the local school administrators are not as politically or technically sophisticated as their colleagues west of the mountains. As one highly-placed administration official in a large LEA described the situation,

> The east side of the state is not as political as the west side...we kind of do our own little thing. We're not a very active group over here... We don't have a lot of parent organizations. We're not out lobbying... It's just kind of we wait and see what happens.

Dr. Bruno and the other state-level actors faced stiff opposition from this region in the mid-1960's, despite the political naivete of many LEA personnel. This opposition came primarily from the county superintendents. They believed that their county systems provided adequate service. Furthermore they were worried about their jobs. When they found out that the proposed system would consolidate many counties in their area, they knew that all but one would be out of a job. One former county superintendent recalled that most people thought it clear that the superintendent from Waters County, Lee Wilson, would naturally get the position because his was the only urban county. This same former superintendent had testified before numerous legislative committees against the ISD proposal.

Two forces were working for the ISD proposal, and the opponents were unable to overcome them. The first was the salary limitation on county superintendencies. Before the ISD system the salary of a county superintendent was based on population. The proposed ISD system promised a way around that constitutional limitation for those who managed to land the ISD superintendent job. The second force was the number of deals made by SPI Bruno to lessen the opposition of the county superintendents. A county superintendent who opposed the ISD proposal recalled,

> I wasn't the only one, you see, there were any number of county superintendents that went with me, but they pulled out, one by one, when they were promised certain things. For example, the superintendency of the new ISD district, if and when it was formed. And they got let down in many cases.

Bruno also had to appease local people concerned about the loss of local control that they anticipated. This concern was heightened when it became apparent that the proposal called for the consolidation of many counties into such a large area. Bruno's solution to this was to authorize the establishment of several satellite offices to serve the areas farthest away from the main ISD headquarters. These offices were to have a more restricted set of personnel and to be only temporary. The appeasement tactic was successful, but the locals managed to hang on to their satellite offices -- which were really just continuations of the county superintendencies -- far longer than Bruno had anticipated. It is perhaps ironic that three of these offices outlasted Bruno himself, who retired in 1973. One closed in 1975. Another closed in 1981, although East's functions there had ceased in 1980.

The last one (over 100 miles from East headquarters) closed in 1982. It had been the largest, with fiscal service personnel, special education personnel, one vocational education person, and an instructional materials center that closed a few years before the entire operation was shut down.

As mandated in 1969, East began. As insiders had predicted, Lee Wilson, the former county superintendent of Waters County, was given the job of superintendent. His administration was the continuation of a county-centered system. Wilson himself had been opposed to the ISD proposal. According to one former county superintendent, Wilson felt that the proposed area of East was too large. When asked what the Wilson administration accomplished, the same individual replied: "Nothing! ...We just kind of remained stagnant, I guess you'd say."

Admittedly, Wilson was faced with a host of problems in the establishment of any such organization. But even after dealing with personnel problems (that were never fully solved), the ESD Board, the Advisory Council (RAC), and the LEA superintendents, Wilson never exhibited an innovative bent in the substantive program area. This might have been a function of East's task environment, which is dominated by small, rural LEAs.

Two services originated under his tenure which should be noted. Leland's audio-visual collection was appropriated by East, and with contributions from other LEAs, was expanded. This was later to become East's highly-touted audio-visual cooperative. Additionally, a cooperative purchasing program was instituted shortly before Wilson retired. This was also to become one of East's most successful programs in the late 1970's.

In 1973 Louis Cator replaced Wilson as East's superintendent. He was chosen by the ESD Board (ESDB) instead of the assistant superintendent, Len Kerwin, who continued in that position. The ESDB wanted an outsider; they were dissatisfied with Wilson's lack of programmatic vigor. They also wanted someone with sparkling credentials, which Cator had. Kerwin had failed to receive his doctorate. The ESDB was very optimistic about Cator, who died of a heart attack less than two years after his appointment. As one Board member remembers,

> He wasn't there very long, and I think it [Cator's administration] would have been excellent, but he wasn't there long enough to really, you see, those things aren't done overnight.

Effective leadership takes time to establish in an organization like East.

But Cator did make some progress, especially in comparison to his predecessor. He continued to expand the purchasing cooperative. Its budget more than doubled in the two years of Cator's stint. At the time of his death in 1975, it accounted for over half of East's $2.8 million dollar budget. The aggregate budget was increased by $1 million between 1973 and 1975. In addition to this, the data processing cooperative and student assessment programs were started. In the next few years, the natural evolution of computer processing would tie these two programs together, as assessment services (testing, scheduling, grading) became computerized.

Despite these achievements, Cator's administration never got up to full speed. It took him time, because of his "outsider" status, to learn to be effective within the agency. He also was oriented towards fiscal and administrative innovations, rather than substantive programs like special education.

More emphasis on programs began when Len Kerwin was chosen to succeed Cator in 1975. Because their earlier doubts about Kerwin had not been altogether resolved, the Board appointed him "acting superintendent" for the first school year (1975-1976). In addition to his lack of a doctorate -- he had been the superintendent of a rural county when the ESD was created -- Kerwin presented a negative image to those who judged him on the basis of his personal mannerisms, speech, and written style.

During that school year, the Board received a pleasant surprise. Recalls one Board member,

> He doesn't form a very good appearance. He's a very poor speaker...but he has organizational ability beyond, you just can't believe it.

East had been stagnant up to that point. The same Board member, when questioned about the agency's expansion, responded,

> It hadn't been [growing], but it began to as soon as Kerwin went in.

After the new superintendent had worked out some personnel problems, he took steps to build up his contacts with local districts. This jibed with the name change from ISDs to Educational Service Districts, which Cator had advocated, and which was passed in 1975 by the Legislature.

Kerwin created a vehicle for LEA contact that East staff members commonly call the "dog and pony show." Each spring, the executive staff of East, often with additional subordinate personnel, visits each county in the ESD area. They attend a session of the monthly meeting of all the LEA superintendents in that county. They describe their services and solicit input regarding their programs. This is the primary mechanism that LEAs have to influence the goals of the agency. The ESD may see it more as a public relations "show" than a useful device for two-way communication. But Kerwin recognized that the ESD needed support from the LEAs, especially since county funding was rapidly waning in the latter half of the 1970's. The "dog and pony show" was and is an effective way to build and maintain the requisite support.

In 1976 Kerwin was offered the superintendent's job and his "acting" status was removed. That year, his administration attended to the nuts and bolts of managing East, particularly its personnel system. Policies on employee travel privileges (e.g., expense deductions and use of ESD vehicles), employee membership in professional associations (East staff remains non-unionized), and performance evaluations were some of the targets. The East Board decided that formal annual personnel evaluations should be instituted. New employees were to undergo evaluation after 90 days and again after six months.

A major innovation came in 1978 with the creation of an unemployment cooperative for school employees in East's area. In 1977, the State decided that school employees were to be covered by unemployment insurance. Local school districts had a choice under the new law. They could deduct a percentage of their employees' salaries and pay that directly to the State. In that case, laid-off employees would be compensated by the State. The alternative was to work out a self-insurance program. With the help of a few other ESDs, East devised a regional cooperative to insure its own LEAs. The LEAs were reticent to attempt individual self-insurance programs because of the financial and political risks involved. As one local business manager said:

> We don't have to be in any of these coops. But, we feel, economically, for a district like ours of 6,000 students and ten buildings, that there is no other economical competition other than the ESD. There's no way that we feel we can conduct a film library, an audio visual program for $3.50 per student. There is no way we could do that. Unemployment insurance could be done on our own; we could go the self-insured [route]. We would have to have about $100,000 in cash reserves, which would always be the target of misunderstanding and the potential would be there to tap that money to pay for other things.

Kerwin and his fiscal administrator drafted East's cooperative agreement, at the same time that four other ESDs established unemployment cooperatives, The program is a large success. Each year the cooperative pool increases, as they invest it in short-term securities. The profit from this investment pays not only their claims, but their administrative expenses as well (including the cost control agent's fee!) In May 1982, there was $787,000 in the cooperative pool.

In 1978 a special education cooperative was started by East -- the first major substantive programmatic innovation since the agency's birth in 1969. As federal regulations concerning handicapped individuals increased in number and degree, more federal dollars became available to fund the necessary services at the local level. ESD East was relatively late in finding a way to deal with the pressures on the local districts from both federal and state laws.

The geography of East made the special education programs especially important. Many of the LEAs in East's region had only a handful of handicapped children; severe handicaps were that much rarer. The low incidence of these conditions and the specialized expertise necessary to deal with them made it impossible for the small rural LEAs to offer complete care.

The cooperative established by East offered physical therapists, psychologists and technical consultation. Some of the services deserve special note. One provided federal (94-142) dollars to supplement services for handicapped children not receiving complete services through state funding. A second program identified and served handicapped preschoolers. The consultative section was vitally important to rural LEAs with no expertise or experience to design the required individual education plans for the students. The East consultants helped the LEAs meet their responsibilities to parents, students, and state monitors. ESD personnel assisted the OSPI in the actual monitoring of LEAs, insofar as their special education programs were legally required, although the state eventually relieved them of formal compliance responsibility.

As the cooperative came to offer more services, each LEA paid only for the specific services they desired. One ESD staff member called this "the menu approach."

In 1978, East expanded its use of computers to include some regulatory functions mandated by OSPI. These were primarily fiscal services: East was responsible for checking the budget and annual financial report of each LEA. These two functions entail cyclical demands for data processing: OSPI rules mandate that the budgets be submitted to East in the spring of every year and the financial reports are due at the end of every summer. As the director of East's Fiscal Services Division summarized the process and its dynamics,

> That's all been delegated to us by the State Superintendent. We have literally become, where those two reports are concerned, because the budget's done the same way -- we use the computer to check the budgets too, we have literally become an arm of the SPI in those two areas.

At the time that Kerwin became acting superintendent of East (1975), Marvin Porter became its curriculum director. Because of the relationship between Kerwin and Porter and the influence Porter exerted on the agency before he became the next superintendent, we will now focus on Marvin Porter.

Marvin Porter launched his educational career as a teacher in the Leland school district as a teacher of economics and government. He ran successfully for the State Legislature while still a teacher, and became involved in budgeting for education in Washington. He quit teaching after four years in the Legislature because he was away from his classes so often. When Dr. Cator offered him a chance to be Curriculum Director of the ISD with a very flexible schedule, he accepted. He worked both positions for two years, benefiting both organizations in a number of ways. He was promoted to assistant superintendent by Kerwin shortly after Kerwin became permanent superintendent of East. While employed by East, Porter wrote Chapter 275 (1975), which changed ISDs to ESDs. He also wrote the revised funding formula that was passed by the Legislature in 1981. This formula embodied a primary emphasis on ESD service to 2nd class LEAs.

From the beginning of Kerwin's tenure, he and Porter had worked together closely. Staff members accepted it easily; many thought Porter possessed the communication skills that Kerwin lacked. One East Board member called Porter "Kerwin's mouthpiece." Kerwin ran into health problems shortly after his accession as superintendent. He often took extended leaves of absence in the late 1970's for health reasons, another reason to promote Porter quickly to assistant superintendent. As time went on, Porter came more and more to assume the primary leadership position in the agency. Porter himself, his executive staff, and the Board realized this, and all suggested that it was impossible to distinguish the tenures of the two men in any real sense.

In a purely formal sense, Kerwin left East permanently, retiring on a medical disability, in 1981. But as early as 1978, Porter was making most of the decisions. Between 1977 and 1979, East's budget increased by 75%, to just under $6.2 million. Staff continued to expand, partly because the OSPI continued to assign new functions to the ESDs. The agency's special education cooperative also continued to expand, both in number of students served and in types of services provided. By 1979, they had an "Arts for the Handicapped" program: first, to provide training for professional artists to instruct handicapped students, and second, to provide occasions where artists, teachers, and handicapped students can interact.

In 1981, the agency budget had expanded to $7.6 million, but East was experiencing severe fiscal stress despite the expansion. East has always been relatively dependent on state funding, as opposed to grant money. Despite the fact that the new funding formula instituted in 1981 favored ESDs catering to predominantly 2nd class LEAs (like East), it also had the effect of cutting all ESDs' budgets sharply. By dividing the core funding into thirds, and only taking responsibility for one-third, the Legislature mandated another third from the LEAs, and made the last third optional. This effectively reduced core funding by one-third, since the chances of collecting the optional third were widely perceived to be zero. After ESD East issued credits on portions of the mandated third to some large LEAs, the net effect was a 38% reduction in core funding. The executive staff member who handles the internal finances of the agency said that the formula was a compromise to encourage the ESDs to justify their existence to the LEAs if they wanted to continue at their present funding level. He stated,

> Basically, there were different bills introduced, you know, do away with ESDs... The school districts basically got on the phone, sent letters to the Legislature that, "we need ESDs and whatever." So then as a compromise [the Legislature] said, 'O.K., if these school districts need ESDs so bad, let them pay for them." And so they instituted that billing process.

In order to manage this fiscal pressure, Porter took a number of steps in the past two years. First, he arranged to give credits to some LEAs, especially large ones, to ease the burden of the funding formula. This included swallowing cost increases in the active cooperative programs in data-processing and audio-visual services. In addition, the ESD closed its own printing facility, and agreed to contract with the Leland LEA to do East's printing. This meant increased revenue to Leland with only minor additional expenses. Similar arrangements were made with other large districts. As one local official commented:

> The thing that is novel about what our ESD has done is their whole attitude of accommodating the districts. [The superintendent] perceived and recognized the negative influence of the [funding change] and went to the larger districts to say, "Hey, I understand what you are going through and you're in tight budget straits." He said, "We'll take into account some of the things that you buy from us and we'll subsidize the increased cost...printing, data processing,..." They froze our special education charges...gave us a credit for my time out of the district to attend [a coop meeting]... In the short term, it was a very prudent move and it purchased good will.

Porter purposely did not fill positions as they became vacant, including the two that he himself had previously occupied. The positions of Curriculum Director and Assistant Superintendent simply no longer exist at East. The functions performed by all the positions that were closed out were spread around to the remaining personnel. The result is that some personnel seem to have authority over areas they know nothing about. An example of this is a special education expert with formal authority over pupil transportation and traffic safety. Informally, this resulted in a mild decentralization of authority across the ESD. ESD East was reorganized into two divisions. Educational Services and Special Services were consolidated into Special Programs, while Fiscal Services remained as it was, though with fewer positions.

In 1982, East was still a formidable organization. The budget was down slightly, from $7.6 to $6.8 million. Cuts continue. But the number of employees is up slightly from 92 to 110. 1980 was the peak year for personnel, with 116.

The cooperative programs include the special services cooperative (which includes gifted education), cooperative purchasing, data processing, unemployment insurance, audio-visual services and traffic safety education.

Below are brief descriptions of several other projects and cooperatives, most of which are state and federally-funded:

Remediation Assistance Program Cooperative. A three district cooperative which employs an itinerant reading teacher to instruct under-achieving students in grades 2-6. The ESD is the fiscal agent.

Public Service Employment Title VI. This project employs economically disadvantaged persons in the ESD, to train individuals for careers in the public sector.

URRD Counseling Co-op. This project provides counseling services to high school students in eight rural districts through the use of an itinerant career counselor.

Minigrants. This project provides an opportunity for elementary and secondary teachers to compete for small grants to implement innovative curriculum ideas.

School Health Curriculum Project. This project provides health education in-service to teachers in seven rural school districts.

Teacher Centers. This project provides instructors with in-service sessions, materials exchange and a variety of services designed to assist and develop their instructional skills.

Very Special Arts Festival. This project, of national acclaim, provides an opportunity for special education students and adults to participate in arts and performance workshops.

Gifted. This project provides specialized programming for gifted and talented students in rural school districts.

Arts for the Handicapped. This project provides training for professionals who work with the handicapped in the area of "learning through the arts."

Preschool Incentive. This project is to provide support services to handicapped preschoolers who are unable to be enrolled in public school programs.

Special Program Coordination. This project provides technical assistance to ESD and rural districts to develop coordinated categorical programs, including Title I, Special Education, Remediation, Bilingual Education and Testing.

Special Education Monitoring. This project assists the OSPI in meeting state and federal requirements for evaluation and technical assistance to local districts' special education programs.

Direction Service. This project is to coordinate social service agencies and school district services to handicapped students, thus saving time, energy and money in providing services to the handicapped.

CHEFS. This project coordinates the expertise and resources of food service personnel, teachers, and school nurses to help K-8 students improve their dietary habits and attitudes about food.

Traffic Safety. This project provides funds to districts within the ESD to develop local bicycle safety education programs. A related project provides in-service and materials to local school districts dealing with bicycle and pedestrian safety.

Transportation. This project provides technical assistance to local school districts in all aspects of pupil transportation, such as route design, driver education, program management, and budget preparation.

Youth Employment Training Program. This project provides career development for economically disadvantaged high school students.

The largest programs are the purchasing cooperative, almost three million dollars, and the youth employment training program (YETP), almost $1.5 million. In comparison, the administration of ESD East costs approximately $400,000, and the various handicap programs cost just under $700,000. It is probably unfair to infer that these amounts faithfully reflect the ESD's priorities. As in the case of ESD West, the budgets are the products of many factors, not the least of which is the availability of funding.

To summarize East's history from 1975 to 1982, the influence of Marvin Porter was instrumental in setting general directions, both before and after his formal accession to the superintendency in 1981. As contrasted with the relative inaction of the pre-1975 period, the agency exhibited much more substantive programmatic activity. While the organizational problems that had plagued the agency early on did not disappear, fiscal stress has become the major problem in recent years. Marvin Porter practiced a leadership style accurately characterized as politically-oriented, until his retirement in 1982.

3. Internal Management

The first place to look for an explanation of the ESD's internal management is its leadership. Historically, East has had a high degree of turnover in the superintendent position. As of the end of 1982, the organization will have had five different people in the top spot, with detrimental effects on the internal organization. No long-term direction was able to arise out of such an unstable situation. There has been a certain degree of continuity since the mid-1970's due to Porter's continued influence. However his primary efforts were directed outward, particularly to the state-level actors. He fostered an absence of any bureaucratic routine, as his staff described it. Freedom can be constructive; recall how the freedom to innovate was put to good use in ESD West. But when there is no underlying philosophy, freedom can promote anomie or even anarchy. In the case of East, it seemed to promote, at the least, a state of stagnation. Few efforts were made to inculcate any sense of organizational mission or loyalty. The enormous size of the region East is called on to serve makes the lack of any unifying sense of mission that much more serious. With a majority of the personnel spending most of their time away from the organization, it is only natural that no mission would develop spontaneously. The presence of multiple satellite offices during most of East's life span have contributed to this situation.

Porter leaves the managerial duties to his executive staff of three capable people. Because the two division heads are concerned with their specific programs, the brunt of the internal management task seems to fall on the shoulders of a capable man named Eric Fox. His title of Administrative Assistant belies his importance; staff members refer to him as "Mr. Inside." He has been with East since 1974. When he arrived there was little in the way of established management techniques. As he remembers, the agency "just kind of flew by the seat of the pants." He established a number of procedural innovations step by step, to avoid internal opposition. These include record-keeping systems, purchase order systems, employee leave reporting systems (both manual and automated), and expenditure monitoring devices. The emphasis has clearly been towards the automation of many mundane tasks. And that is the crucial point in our context. He has brought some order to East, but on a level that is only concerned with efficiency. Only a person in the superintendent's position could have brought some kind of order on a policy-making level. The four superintendents failed to accomplish this.

A major consequence of this is that internal goal-setting is almost non-existent, at the top or from the bottom, except in a purely idiosyncratic way. Thanks to Mr. Fox, there are formal evaluations of personnel. But these have little effect either on individual performance (salary increases are automatic) or organizational policy-making. Active leadership from the superintendent would be required for the evaluations to have any real effect, by making sanctions for negative evaluations a serious prospect.

Because ESD East has not taken on a variety of technically complex programs and because local districts make relatively few demands, the ESD has been able to survive in a centralized form with little structural complexity. Unlike organizations in dynamic, heterogeneous environments, East has resisted increasing programmatic sophistication and decentralization. For example, budgeting and hiring are centralized, and financial procedures are increasingly controlled from the top, rather than in the programs.

The superintendent saw the key to East's success not in motivating his staff, but rather in motivating the local districts. For example:

> Our success depends on the relationship that the ESD has developed with the [Superintendents' Advisory Cabinet]. When I first came here we couldn't even get anybody to show up. There was such little respect and little credibility between the cabinet and this agency that they didn't care. One of the things that I did when I got [this position] was that I set forth to reestablish those ties and those communications. Now it's a rare thing when we don't have 100 percent attendance.
>
> This job is a pressure cooker. The pressure is always there. There's no getting away from the pressures... It's like trying to juggle five balls at the same time... [The] job is primarily political; it's a brushfire job, it's a stroking job; a people job. It's a job where you go out and you make a commitment to a district. [If] there isn't support for us we're in trouble. Because, you see, the teachers can't help and the principals can't help. The local superintendents deal with the Legislature, not the teachers... This is a field-centered organization.

This view explains his choices about how to spend his time to maximize the performance of ESD East.

The ESD has focused its energies on programs that do not require special professional or technical expertise. The cooperatives, for example, succeed because they offer economies of scale. Although the ESD administers them adequately, the technology is perfectly straightforward. Thus there is no need for the ESD's staff to be more skilled or innovative than local district staff. According to local observers, they are not:

> I think more highly of how the ESD's services are improving than maybe what they actually are. ... I don't mean to sound negative, but we don't need them! Our staff is much more sophisticated than theirs. All of our program people are highly skilled, highly trained, and well informed. If the ESD were to cease to exist today, I doubt that our educational programming in this city would be harmed in any way. We certainly have a lot more expertise right here because people here deal with their specific jobs 24 hours a day and they are the experts.
>
> We've got competent expertise on our staff. What we're really buying from the ESD is a service, not wisdom; simple access to a computer system that provides us with some efficiencies for us to report data to the state and to meet [our internal needs].

The ESD has been able to thrive by providing economies of scale and administrative efficiencies to many small rural districts. The superintendents have concentrated on selling these efficiencies to the local district, not on maximizing the quality of services by careful internal control over staff and programs, not on developing innovative solutions or diagnoses of educational problems, not on seeking external funding or stimulation. The relative simplicity and routinization of the ESD's internal management reflects these management choices.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

East's environment is relatively homogenous; 85% of its constituent LEAs are 2nd class districts. Almost all of these are rural and sparsely populated. East's environment is also relatively stable because small rural LEAs are inherently less powerful in their individual dealings with the ESD than are large urban LEAs. If the Los Gatos district, with 214 students, dropped out of all East's cooperatives, this would have little effect on the ESD's ability to continue functioning.

The ESD and its constituent LEAs engage in relationships that yield mutual benefit. The small, rural LEAs are free to choose whether to participate in the agency's programs. Some are legally required (e.g., OSPI-mandated financial reports from the LEAs to the ESD), but most are not. However, these small LEAs need ESD East and its programs. A new superintendent of a small district said,

> After one year, I'm really a believer in the services of ESD, especially to small, rural schools. I think we need them... I think they just really provide a critical service.

These sentiments -- the essential nature of the agency's programs --were echoed by all the personnel from the small LEAs. The larger districts are much more ambivalent. According to one superintendent:

> Virtually all the large districts say the same thing: the small districts need them. If it hits the point where funding for the ESDs is drastically curtailed and we are to be assessed further to maintain them, you're going to hear, "Hey, there's other ways to do it; bag the ESDs."

A special education director in the same district, perhaps more keenly aware of what the ESD can do on a day-to-day basis, was less critical:

> Could we exist without the ESD? For sure we could. The small districts could not. If I were their superintendent, I doubt if I could make it. I would think I would need those services greatly.

The ability to operate without the ESD is greatest in the affluent, suburban districts. Depending on the type of philosophy set by the superintendent, however, attitudes toward the ESD can vary considerably. The superintendent of one suburban district known for its administrative efficiencies -- largely the result of heavy use of ESD cooperatives -- said:

> We're the largest district in our ESD that really uses coops extensively. Purchasing, data processing, special education, testing -- we have been strong supporters of all of them. While we are not a small district, per se, when compared to other districts in this ESD, we just believe it has a way of keeping our costs down. ... You take the bigger districts, they have many of the services already built into their structures. And they have bypassed some of the services, or have decided not to use them. So,

> they see the ESD possibly as being a [commodity] that they don't need or don't want.

Describing his organization's relations with school districts of both kinds, Porter reiterates the dependency relationship:

> They need us and we're proud and anxious to serve them, and they recognize it, strongly recognize it, and they've proven it a thousand different ways. The 1st class districts didn't perceive that need nearly as much and it's just been within the last year and a half that many of the 1st class districts feel that we have a role to play in their lives.

Cooperative relationships that can yield mutual benefits can still be avoided often because the parties involved feel that the apparent benefits don't outweigh the loss of autonomy. Flexibility and decision-making power are usually reduced in cooperative interaction when, for instance, the necessity arises to compromise with other actors whose priorities don't match one's own. But in the ESD East region, the small LEAs had few alternatives. The only conceivable source of the expertise that the small districts required, aside from the ESD, was the handful of large LEAs in the area. A small district might consider contracting with a large LEA, if it were not for their fear of losing control. One superintendent mentioned the possibility of entering into relationships with large districts, but dismissed it quickly:

> But I think that when it came right down to it, my business would be put off until their business is done... Where I presently deal [East], it's first come, first serve.

As we have noted, the superintendents of ESD East have devoted considerable energy to the dog and pony shows, explaining ESD services and activities to the local districts. The local districts are aware that the ESD is sensitive to their reactions and participation. For example:

> Even in the last legislative session with the mandatory payments he came out and was very concerned that we understood the services that he could provide, so it just wasn't money going down as a convenience to fund the ESD from the Legislature's standpoint, but that he could provide things that would off-set the cost, which he did. ... So, he figured out the cost and indicated that the money we were mandated to pay was bringing us some tangible benefits rather than just buying a pig in a poke.

But other local officials are concerned that the ESD's repertoire of services is limited, compared to the other ESDs. One business manager of a large LEA summarized:

> I think that the ground work is there for the ESD to go out and really market itself to school districts in many, many areas that are not currently being done, and if I had a criticism of this ESD at this stage, it's been a little bit hesitant to get aggressive in these areas, to really go out and try to be more active...

Obviously, many of the LEAs don't need innovative, aggressive methods. The large LEAs that respond to innovation are the very districts that have been appeased (so far) by politically innovative methods. As several local people put it, "Marv is a better politician than he is a superintendent."

An additional problem is East's present mode of garnering support from the large LEAs. The issuance of cash credits and other methods of easing the burden of these LEAs with regard to their mandated payments is dependent upon a large cash reserve. Porter admits that the measures he took, while quite successful politically, are wholly temporary. Through good management, East had accumulated a large reserve, but after depleting it by $112,000 through these support-maintaining methods, they need a new way to handle the situation.

On the whole, the LEAs are satisfied with ESD East's performance. Even the large districts are supportive; Leland and some other large LEAs put a lot of effort into lobbying for East in the last two legislative sessions. While a small minority would like the ESD to be more innovative, most LEA personnel were quick to voice their positive impressions of the agency.

Porter doesn't believe in formal needs assessments. He prides himself on his personal relationships with all the LEA superintendents. His yearly "dog and pony shows" are the only formal mechanism for the LEAs to shape the ESD's agenda. He looks to the RAC for some advice, but not much. The ESD Board routinely ratifies his proposals. He prefers to rely on informal methods of feedback, like conversations at meetings. He feels that formal evaluations make more enemies than friends, because people are insulted when you don't take their suggestions. He enjoys soliciting feedback at the "dog and pony shows" because the group responds. This keeps the troublemakers in line; many superintendents in the small LEAs are used to getting their way. He does make an effort to respond to group consensus. For example, the LEA superintendents complained that the grant manager position was a waste of funds, and it was abolished in 1982.

Many LEA personnel mentioned that the communication that East provided was invaluable. The Special Services Director in the Leland district said,

> This ESD has been very good at holding meetings of any kind which would be of interest to the districts of the area. The large districts benefit as much as the small districts. For small LEAs, East also acts as a broker of expertise, capitalizing on their central position in a regional communication network. They will often get a large LEA staff member to help out a small LEA if they can't provide the needed resource.

One other point deserves mention. The LEAs do not, for the most parts, resent the regulatory functions that the ESD must perform. East has made it clear that those functions were imposed from above; the ESD is merely the messenger. Most of the LEAs, especially the larger ones, get along fine with the OSPI. The few who are still aggrieved direct their anger at the OSPI, not at the ESD.

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

Most of the extensive contacts between ESD East and state-level policy makers occur because of Marvin Porter's political activities. These activities can yield substantial benefits for ESD East. For example, Porter's influence over Chapter 275 resulted in a law that favored ESDs with large numbers of small LEAs, ESDs like ESD East. But there are two other reasons for contact: program and regulatory business. There are program contacts, both formal and informal. Formal contacts occur between program personnel and OSPI staff at monthly special education meetings and at the regional WASA meetings which are also monthly. Often the WASA meetings are held at the urging of East if, for instance, the LEAs need a new procedure, regulation or program explained. Other program business is transacted over the phone, when ESD personnel need information or advice from the various program people at OSPI. For example, the Special Programs Director and Eric Fox both solicit advice concerning the availability of grants from their contacts at OSPI.

Occasionally, the OSPI asks East to try out an idea or serve as a demonstration site for a new program. The data-processing cooperative began at the behest of OSPI. A current example is a new project to computerize teacher certification. The OSPI chose East to pilot the project because of the East mix of large and small LEAs in the region.

In addition to the program contacts, which are usually consultative or explanatory in nature, the ESD carries out regulatory functions for the OSPI. The Director of Fiscal Services is in contact with personnel at OSPI concerning the budgets he must approve for the LEAs. The special education monitor works continually with a monitoring team from OSPI. There are personnel at the ESD placed there by OSPI, including the former grant manager and a regional traffic safety coordinator at East. These multiple lines of contact keep the ESD reasonably well-informed about state plans, programs, and policies.

CHAPTER VI

INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN MICHIGAN

A. THE STATE CONTEXT

1. Chronology of Events

1891

State law establishes the office of county commissioner of schools to serve Michigan's 83 counties. The commissioners, who are political appointees, have responsibility for keeping attendance and financial records for the county, monitoring one-room schools to make sure they comply with state rules, and enforcing compulsory attendance laws. Earlier in the 19th century, a system of county superintendents had been tried but was quickly abandoned.

1947

With the active support of most county commissioners, the legislature amends the school code to establish county school districts and to require the election of a county board of education. The county board of education has the authority to hire a county superintendent to replace the patronage job of county commissioner. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) receives funds to pay the salaries of the county superintendents. They are assigned all the functions of the county commissioners and more, with a particular charge to assist the MDE in encouraging school district reorganization.

1954

William Emerson, Oakland County Superintendent, proposes a demonstration plan to levy a county-wide tax to be used to support programs for mentally handicapped children. Oakland County runs such programs for three years with the encouragement of the MDE.

1957

After seeing Oakland County's success with special education programs, the legislature allows all county districts to propose to the voters a tax to support special education programs. Over the next five years, many counties successfully persuade their voters to levy charter millage earmarked for regional programs for handicapped children.

1962

The legislature passes Act 190 abolishing the office of County Superintendent and creating Intermediate School Districts (ISDs). ISDs are given the authority to propose to their voters the levy taxes to raise general operating funds. ISDs are also required to serve a minimum of 5000 students. Because some of the 83 counties do not enroll that many students, they combine with other counties to form 60 intermediate school districts.

1963

The ISDs are given authority to levy taxes to support area vocational programs. These programs are to be set up by the ISD but operated by local school districts and community colleges.

1964

State law (PA 289) gives the ISDs responsibility for improved school district reorganization. The legislature requires ISDs to conduct reorganization studies within their boundaries to encourage local districts that do not offer a full K-12 curriculum to combine.

1965

The U.S. Congress passes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). Over the next few years funds become available to support the development of regional film libraries (under Title II) and innovative programs (Title III) located in ISDs.

1966

The passage of PA 21 allows ISDs to issue bonds for the construction of office and service buildings of their own. The legislature also approves a bill granting ISDs the right to finance the construction and maintenance of area vocational facilities.

1968

The MDE publishes a comprehensive study of Michigan's financing of elementary and secondary education by J. Alan Thomas. The study points out the wide variability across ISDs in size, budget, and programs offered and concludes that many local school districts are not well served by their ISDs.

The legislature passes PA 320, which permits ISDs to provide grants to its local districts or community colleges to construct area vocational centers.

1969

The Governor's Commission on Educational Reform recommends that ISDs be reorganized. Finding that "the intermediate districts, in most cases, are a largely ineffective part of our education structure...," the commission proposes redrawing ISD boundaries to create 10-15 ISDs that could operate with greater economies of scale, and provide more sophisticated services to local school districts. The legislature categorically rejects the Commission's recommendations.

ISDs receive authority to operate their own area vocational education programs. Up until now, the programs were operated by local districts and community colleges under contract with the ISDs.

1970

At the initiative of a group of ISD media directors, the Legislature passes a bill to establish Regional Educational Media Centers. The MDE and a committee of media specialists propose boundary lines for 8 REMCs. Over the next year, pressure from ISD and local school administrators and legislators increases the number to 22 centers. Each REMC serves several ISD regions.

1971

The Mandatory Special Education Act of 1971 (PA 198) is passed. This revolutionizes state law concerning handicapped children, and sets up stringent requirements for school districts to ensure that they offer appropriate education to all children under the age of 26. The act assigns major new responsibilities to ISDs, including charges to develop a regional plan for special education, maintain records of all handicapped children in their region, and monitor local and regional special education programs to make sure that they comply with the law and rules.

1972

The Michigan State Chamber of Commerce recommends that the ISDs be consolidated into 13-20 regional educational serve districts, to make more effective use of available resources.

1973

The formula for distributing state aid to intermediate school districts is changed. Under the old system, state aid was a pro-rated match to local contributions to ISDs. Thus, ISDs that received significant local funds also received a large share of state funds. The new formula is based on the size of the student population and the tax base in the county. In addition ISDs receive equalization aid for their vocational and special education millages, designed to even out the yield of equal tax effort in poor and rich counties.

1975

The U.S. Congress adopts PL94-142, establishing national standards for the education of handicapped children. Because the federal requirements are somewhat more lenient than Michigan's standards under the Mandatory Special

Education Law, special education programs are not much affected. But the federal law makes available new funds for ISD programs.

1976

The Michigan Efficiency Task Force issues yet another call for consolidation of ISDs. The task force proposes that 22 ISDs be created within the boundary lines of the 22 Regional Education Media Centers.

1978

At the initiative of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators, Alexander Kloster conducts a survey of ISD and local superintendents. He too concludes that ISDs should be reorganized and recommends the REMC lines as new boundaries.

Funds become available for programs for gifted and talented students. The funds are routed to ISDs to hire consultants who serve local school districts.

1979

State Senator Kammer, chair of the education appropriations subcommittee, introduces legislation to consolidate and reorganize the ISDs along the lines of the REMCs. Hearings on the bill reveal strong opposition from superintendents of those smaller ISDs that would be consolidated with others under the proposed plan. The bill is eventually redrafted in response to educators' concerns, but fades from view.

1980

The Middle Cities Association, which represents most of Michigan's urban areas, proposes legislation to permit large cities to divorce themselves from their regional ISDs and act as their own ISDs. The MDE and MAISA oppose the proposal strenuously, arguing that such a divorce would isolate minority children in cities and would weaken the effectiveness of regional cooperation.

1981

State Superintendent Runkel launches Project Outreach to seek public support for elementary and secondary education and to improve confidence in Michigan's schools. The project is located in 10 intermediate school districts.

1982

Data from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, that track student skill levels, are reported not only for each classroom, school building, and school district, but also for each intermediate school district.

There are now 57 Intermediate School Districts, as a few of the smaller ISDs have merged to cover two to five counties.

2. State Context

Intermediate school districts in the state of Michigan were formally established in 1962, but regional units have existed in some form since 1827. Townships functioned as intermediate units with purely regulatory functions from 1827 to 1891, when the Legislature established county commissioners of education. These county commissioners were assigned the functions of the township inspectors, as well as new regulatory functions such as monitoring school attendance and financial records.

Various attempts to dampen the overt political nature of the township and county offices dotted the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, including a short-lived attempt to replace township inspectors with county superintendents in 1867. The 1891 switch to county commissioners did not eliminate the politicization of the office. Worries about the conflict between partisan and professional values culminated in a 1947 law establishing elected county boards of education. These boards hired county superintendents, thus changing the job from a patronage position to a professional one, accountable to a lay board. The county commissioners hoped that a county board of education would be more committed to education than the lay county commissioners, who were seldom interested in education. As one state administrator commented,

> Well, they would remove themselves from the supervision of the Board of Supervisors which may or may not have had much understanding of the educational function or very little understanding...

The county school districts took on the responsibilities of the former commissioners of education and some new ones. The history since 1947 is marked by steady growth in activities, programs, and expertise at the regional level. The county boards and superintendents were principally concerned with supervision of local school districts too small or too poor to hire their own superintendent, boundary changes and consolidation of local districts, and state requirements to conduct a census, audit local records, and register teacher certification. During the 1950's, several entrepreneurial county superintendents began to make a contribution beyond these legal mandates. They developed services such as library book recommendations, cooperative programs in staff development and media services, and programs for handicapped children. These services gradually acquired legislative endorsement, as the school code expanded the list of functions permitted to county districts.

The most important change in the code was the provision that county districts be permitted to ask the voters to levy taxes earmarked for special education. This change, the first major effort to stimulate more and better services for handicapped students, located both legal authority and funds at the county level, rather than in local districts. The reason appears to have been the successful demonstration of county programming done in Oakland County, and the political acumen of the Oakland county superintendent, William Emerson. Through the statewide association of county superintendents, he and several other aggressive county superintendents lobbied for the authority and funds to make a real difference in the education of children with special needs. He succeed in persuading the legislature that the expertise and economies of scale possible at the county level were compelling enough to justify the millage provision. Many counties adopted millages for special education in the late 50's and early 60's. This success set a precedent for county-wide programming that has developed into an unusually diverse menu of regional activity across the state.

In spite of some scattered progress, many educational needs were not being met by the county boards. A 1957 study by a legislative advisory committee pointed to two important unmet needs: in-service training and handicapped education. Eventually the county superintendencies were replaced through legislative mandate in 1962, with the passage of Public Act 190 which established ISDs in their stead. The ISDs were required to serve at least 5000 students, resulting in the consolidation of 83 county offices into 60 ISDs.

The ISDs had both mandated functions and optional, but permitted, functions. The mandated functions, mostly regulatory, included: (1) enforce the finance accounting code, the state transportation code, the high school tuition code, the child accounting code, the school lunch code, and the teacher certification code, (2) conduct audits and make other reports as required by the SEA about constituent local school districts, (3) preside over school district boundary alterations, annexations, consolidations, and area studies, (4) allocate delinquent taxes to local school districts, (5) enforce compulsory school attendance laws, and (6) participate in actions of the tax allocation board.

In addition, the newly-created ISDs were permitted to offer services for the education of handicapped children and other services including: (1) operate specialized clinics for the children of constituent school districts, (2) provide instructional materials, libraries, and centers for the use of constituent school districts, (3) provide specialized help to teachers, (4) provide in-service educational training for teachers and administrators, (5) conduct statistical and other research operations, (6) operate programs for trainable mentally handicapped children when local districts refuse to operate such programs, (7) operate schools for wards of the court, (8) operate day-care centers for severely mentally handicapped children, and (9) subsidize and operate cooperative local school operations.

Over the next 10 years, a plethora of legislation assigned new functions and responsibilities to the ISDs, or gave them ways to carry out their functions in a more suitable manner. These included the establishment of Regional Educational Media Centers (REMCs), the authority to levy (with voter approval) millage for vocational education and, a few years later, to build and operate vocational education centers, as well as permission to contract with an LEA or community college for vocational programs, money to support consultants for gifted education, responsibility for auditing bus routes to ensure proper reimbursement, food services and institutional programs, and, most dramatically, new responsibilities in special education. The passage of Michigan's Mandatory Special Education Law in 1971 gave many new responsibilities for programming and regulation to ISDs. The ISDs were required to develop and evaluate a regional plan for special education in the entire ISD area, maintain records of all handicapped persons from birth to age 25 who have not completed school, provide services to those children who are not appropriately serviced by their local districts, and monitor compliance in all special education programs.

One indicator of the centrality of the ISD functions in Michigan is the array of funding mechanisms available to support ISD services. ISDs may receive voter-approved millages for special education (56 of 57 ISDs) and vocational education (23 of 57 ISDs), a share of allocated millage from county taxes (all 57), state aid on a formula basis from the general school aid formula (all 57), discretionary state categorical grants, federal categorical grants, state reimbursement for staff and pupil membership, tuition for non-resident students, user fees for certain services, and support for special projects located in the ISDs. These sources can add up to substantial sums. The SEA reported in 1980 that the 25 ISDs serving regions with less than 11,000 students spent $155 per pupil; the 16 ISDs serving regions with 11,000-22,000 students spent $129 per pupil; the 12 ISDs serving 22,000-60,000 spent $107 per pupil; and the 5 ISDs serving more than 60,000 spent $53 per pupil. The scope of ISD programming varies enormously across the state. Some offer only the mandated services; some are elaborate, sophisticated service providers.

ISDs have formal responsibility for many regulatory tasks like budget review, transportation monitoring, student enrollment audits, teacher certifications, and so on. These functions are supported by the allocation from the state aid formula based on number of students and tax base, by the general operating allocation from the ISD's county. The latter is at the discretion of the county commissioners, and some ISDs appear to receive less than the minimum set by the legislature. Data processing, in-service training and curriculum development are also paid for out of the general operating allocation of state and county funds. Some data processing for LEAs is offered on a fee-for-service basis. Fees and grants are the major sources of funds for any vaguely innovative project or program. For instance one ISD received a state grant to explore the use of microcomputers in the classrooms. Some ISDs run cooperative-purchasing programs; their administrative expenses are paid out of the money which the LEAs save or general ISD funds. Some ISDs get federal funds to provide technical assistance for school lunch programs (along with monitoring duties in this area). In the past, migrant and bilingual education programs have been funded by state and federal categorical grants, and so have additional general education programs.

Although the LEAs have authority for special education, the ISDs retain the accountability. This means that the LEA has the choice whether to use ISD services or not, but the ISD is supposed to make sure that services are provided somehow. In theory, if the LEA is negligent, the ISD can step in unilaterally to provide services without the LEA's request. But in practice, service relationships are negotiated peaceably. A supervisor in the SEA's special education division described the ISDs' programs:

> you will find that the intermediate district is generally running programs for the severely handicapped. They generally will not run programs for hearing-impaired, vision-impaired, so forth, but will work to get a local district to do it.

Support services are also commonly provided by ISDs. Teacher consultants, psychologists, social workers and teachers of speech and language-impaired students are often hired by ISDs to serve all or some of their constituent LEAs. The ISD is responsible for the development, implementation and monitoring of a region-wide plan for special education in its area. This combines the coordinative and regulatory aspects of the ISD. ISDs, according to state special education staff, are very cautious in exercising their authority in this and other areas, because ISD Boards are elected by local boards and ISD revenues come largely from local taxpayers.

In vocational education, ISDs operate about half of the area vocational centers funded by the state. ISDs also have the authority, via PA 56, to coordinate consortia among LEAs in vocational education; a handful have been approved by the State Board of Education. In gifted education ISDs are funded through a categorical state mechanism that reimburses the ISD for the salary materials used by an ISD consultant. These consultants provide information, resources and coordination to LEAs. A few provide direct services like summer programs one day per week. The 22 REMCs provide a generous array of media resources to LEAs on a regional basis. Although less than half of the ISDs have a REMC on the premises, all receive REMC services. About half of the REMCs' revenue comes from state aid; the other half is funded through federal Title IV B. (The shift of IVB into Chapter 2 may doom the REMC system.)

In trying to make the tough choices necessary for successful administration of these multiple roles, ISDs are constrained by their dependence on their constituent LEAs. The ISD Boards are elected by local boards, and the ISD board has formal authority over hiring and expenditures. The ISDs are also dependent upon the LEAs for much of their funding. ISD superintendents will not consider asking the voters to approve a millage increase (for special or vocational education) or a bond issue unless their LEAs strongly support them. The millage revenues, once obtained, must be shared with the LEAs. The percentage of funds turned over to LEAs is formally left to the discretion of the ISD superintendent (as it is with state and federal pass-through funds like 94-142). But in practice the ISD superintendents have little choice because of the governance arrangements. They risk the wrath of their Board if they do not approve certain LEA plans and programs (with consequent funding requirements). As one state administrator noted:

> the board members are appointed by their constituent districts, they're not elected, very few are, they have to placate each of their local districts. So they don't have the political ability, if you will, to plan and manage as they should.

Moreover some SEA officials suggested that some ISDs collude with LEAs. For example,

> In many instances, too, one of the problems is that if the ISD does the job that they're supposed to do ... they end up screwing the local

> districts that they are supposed to be working for. Where the guy rubber-stamps the report, he's not doing his job, but he's not penalizing the school district.

The same administrator continued,

> They know what side their bread is buttered on - they get money from the local districts to keep the ISD operating and [if] they turn around and hit some district for about $80,000 in transportation costs [because of non-compliance], somebody could get upset.

Another example of collusion occurs when ISDs permit local districts to collect their share of millage proceeds earmarked for categorical programs, but use those funds as general revenue.

As is often the case with regional education agencies, the ISDs suffer from ambiguity concerning their dual identity as regulators for the state and service providers for their local districts. From the state perspective, the ISDs are regulators. Phrases such as "arms of the state" recur throughout our interviews. Yet more than one SEA official noted that the ISDs attempt to be oriented towards local needs, and that their long-term success often depends on these attempts. One legislative staffer attributed the ISDs' role ambiguity to their origins as county superintendencies:

> These things [ISDs] had sort of evolved out of the old county school districts and no one had ever really said what it is an intermediate school district is supposed to do in Michigan. Is their predominant role to be the policemen for the Department of Education? Is their predominant role to supply consulting services to local districts? Or should they be operating vocational education centers or other kinds of programs?

The ISDs resist even the current burden of regulatory functions, but the SEA would like to assign them additional duties. For example, ISDs can be a sort of "early warning system", to alert the SEA about LEAs badly out of compliance or in serious financial straits. The ISDs are stuck between state-mandated regulatory burdens on one side and, on the other, an overwhelming dependence on local districts in terms of governance and funding.

How and why ISDs came to have these particular responsibilities is both interesting and important. It is interesting because of the almost continual cry for reorganization that has echoed in many quarters since the 1960's, but which has failed to yield any large scale consolidation. It is important because although the educational context of today is different from the context of 1962, the present state of the ISDs is virtually indistinguishable from the structure of the ISD network twenty years ago.

The most significant, sustained conflict involving the ISDs is the question of how many ISDs Michigan really needs. The present number hardly differs from the number of 20 years ago, in spite of 20 years of recommendations that the number be sharply reduced. When the ISDs were created in 1962, the only opponents with any political clout were those county superintendents who were likely to lose their jobs because their regions did not include the required minimum number of students. Local and county superintendents from rural areas expressed fears over a decrease in local control of the educational process. These fears grew out of the potential for the ISDs to assume more responsibility than the county districts had handled. The ISDs to be comprised of multiple counties were especially controversial and the LEAs were afraid that the ISD boards would grow increasingly remote from local concerns. Although educators with these concerns lobbied against PA 190, the legislation was supported by almost everyone else in the education community. The various educational organizations either actively supported the bill (e.g., the SEA) or stayed out of the fray (the Michigan teacher's organization). County superintendents from populated areas supported the bill quite actively, because they relished an increase in authority or possessed a commitment to increased services (like Emerson).

Although some state officials and Legislators hoped that calling the regional educational agencies "ISDs" instead of county districts would encourage consolidation, the structure of regional units has remained constant since the 1960's. There were a few consolidations, and ISDs now number 57. But considering the large number of studies calling for reorganization, how did ISDs remain largely unscathed for over 20 years? Educational experts, management experts, legislators, and even the Governor supported consolidation. Most proposals for reorganization recommend 20-30 ISDs, reducing the current population by at least half. As one state official explained it:

> There are more people with a vested interest in keeping it at the status quo then there are in changing it. And I think you can only cut it, at least in my political view, you can only cut into turf when you have a compelling view on the other side. And we have a rational view on the other side I think. But we don't have a compelling view on the other side. Rationality has to be combined with some political considerations before it becomes compelling. And no one seems to be revolting because it costs too much money. No one seems to be angry because they aren't getting appropriate services. Nobody seems to think that the ISD is getting in their way. And you'd have to have one of those, I guess, in order to get it to budge. And at one point we thought maybe the appropriations committee was going to give the compelling reason -- finances, they were just gonna take it and go off -- and they chose not to do that. It's probably because it's such a small part of the budget that it wasn't worth fighting about over.

The state superintendents have been interested in this issue, but not enough to overcome the passionate resistance of the ISD superintendents who want to hold onto their jobs. From the point of view of these administrators and their local districts:

> Turf [local control] seems to be so much more important than services, that we seem to be getting nowhere...
>
> So that's the political sense; we can come up with the rational stuff and it all makes a whole lot of sense, but politically, not enough people are willing to spend their chips to make it work.

In the past two years, the politics of education in Michigan has been so dominated by funding and local district crises, that ISD consolidation has not been able to capture anyone's attention.

In addition to these political concerns, several structural factors have militated against consolidation. For example, most ISD staff members work under union contracts that are not uniform across ISDs. If a smaller rural ISD paying lower salaries was consolidated with a larger urban ISD paying higher salaries, both contracts would have to be renegotiated. A more serious issue is raised by state law about local taxes. Each ISD is funded by a unique combination of millages approved by the voters in its region. Millage rates for special and vocational education vary widely throughout the state. If two ISDs merge and wish to retain the higher of the two rates for either category, the voters in the larger region must approve the decision. No vocational education millage has passed anywhere in the state in several years, and with the present fiscal climate in Michigan, either type of millage is a risky proposition. Few ISD superintendents care to expose their principal source of funds to the prospect of disapproval. Some observers also believe that consolidation is partially a racial issue. Because the minority population of the state is concentrated in a few large urban centers, the lack of consolidation is considered by some to be tantamount to segregation. Some people fear that consolidation would facilitate bussing (especially in the Detroit metropolitan area), and this fuels their opposition.

For the most part, the local school districts have played a passive role in the pulling and hauling over consolidation. They do not complain about the present level of services they receive, nor about the regulatory oversight exercised by the ISDs. The only malcontents are the members of the Middle Cities Association, representing the larger school districts with the exception of Detroit. They have repeatedly proposed to the legislature that they be allowed to act as their own ISDs, to escape being included with their suburban and rural neighbors whose problems differ so markedly from their own. Partly because of concerns about segregation, partly because it is not clear how to draw the line, the legislature has not been receptive.

As the fiscal crisis deepened, local districts have had to rely more heavily on the major ISD programs in special education, vocational education, and media services. According to state officials, local administrators have been forced to cut back on their own vocational programs, library book and film purchases, and other "frills," leaving them more dependent on ISD offerings. As local superintendents have struggled with their own millage renewal and increase elections, they have been grateful that the special education millages are not their responsibility. They are thus taking more advantage of the economies of scale possible in ISD programs for children with low-incidence handicaps. Where the ISDs are firmly entrenched with funding protected from the vagaries of the state budget, local districts have been happy to support ISD programs. Where the ISDs have been subject to the same steep declines in funding, local districts have been unwilling to defend ISD prerogatives.

The relationships between the state education authorities and the ISDs as a group have been crucial to the ISD's ability to promote state goals in education. Of course the state looms larger in the lives of ISD administrators than ISDs loom in the lives of state officials. As we mentioned above, ISDs are not a major issue in the legislature because of the relatively small share of the budget that ISDs consume. But even small budget items undergo critical scrutiny in hard times and the ISDs have come in for their share of scrutiny. For many years Governor Milliken refused to increase the appropriations for ISDs until the ISD network underwent a large-scale reorganization, thereby addressing the multitude of studies that questioned the efficiency and effectiveness of present arrangements. The common response by the legislative supporters of the ISDs was that effectiveness could be increased only if more funds were forthcoming. This circular "dialogue" continued, while more insightful ISD proponents pressed for consolidation. The most recent attempt at consolidation --to 36 ISDs - seemed to have the most support yet. But its sponsor withdrew it from consideration because it was dividing the educational community at a time when it needed to remain united to cope with the disastrous funding picture in elementary and secondary education.

Four or five of the larger ISDs have individual lobbyists working the legislature. Their presence and effectiveness was noted by not only legislative staff and a legislative analyst in the SEA, but by administrators in the SEA. In contrast to the situation in the fifties and sixties, MASA is now more influential in the legislature than the ISD superintendents' group. With the decline of their collective influence, a few ISDs that can afford it have taken on the job of promoting ISD interests, especially those related to funding.

The relationship between the state education agency and the ISDs varies across the program divisions at the SEA. But all divisions dealing with elementary and secondary education have some regular contact with ISD staff, primarily through telephone communication. Many officials reported daily telephone conversations with ISD personnel. Aside from conversations, meetings at the SEA and on-site visits to ISDs are common. The director of the school support services division meets monthly with the ISD personnel handling food service programs (about half the ISDs have such programs). Before the appropriations for ISD reading consultants were cut, these consultants would meet with SEA reading staff every other month. In the special education division, the SEA has five regional planners that are stationed throughout the state and are in frequent contact with ISD staff. Each of these regional officials acts as a liaison between the ISDs and the special education division, and the regional planners meet with central SEA staff monthly. ISD special education directors are in daily telephone contact with the SEA concerning both compliance and service matters. The telephone conversations between gifted education staff at ISDs and the SEA are often requests to approve deviations from the programs suggested by the SEA. The state superintendent has met with the ISD superintendents four to six times a year for the last few years. The current superintendent exerts forceful leadership during these regular meetings, to "give them information, present them with ideas, ask their cooperation, challenge, so forth." A legislative analyst for the state explained that the present superintendent is better able to elicit loyalty from the ISDs than was his predecessor. He is able "to pull alliances of associations and lobbyists together" because "the school people view him as one of theirs."

SEA officials saw the ISDs playing several roles in the state. One reported that she used the ISDs as communication channels. It is obviously easier for her to contact ISDs than each LEA in the state. She also uses them to decrease her workload as they screen LEA funding applications, sending workable ones on to her. She noted the forum role of the ISDs:

> Well, I think the coordinating part of their activity is really something that districts need to have and when it's not there, I think they feel the loss of that... There's one person in a [local] district usually and they feel extremely isolated. They like to have the ability to get together with people from the region who have similar interests and needs, and they want to know what's going on.

As another state administrator pointed out, the forum role also benefits the SEA: "if the ISDs didn't exist, we would scramble for places to hold our training." Another SEA use of the ISDs as channels for communication occurs when the state sends staff to the ISDs to explain new regulations, funding changes, etc. One director described his use of the ISDs as "the fan-out system." When he received advance information of gasoline price increases, he used the ISDs to relay the message to LEAs so they could fill up their vehicles and save money. Finally, another director used ISDs as leaders in a diffusion and innovation process, for example, in training LEA personnel in new strategies for gifted education.

Most SEA divisions have fairly regular evaluations of the ISDs, both in terms of program evaluation and fiscal monitoring. In special education, the monitoring "is essentially compliance monitoring and we would like to move it to a more evaluative type thing...to have some effect on the quality of programming." Although some classroom observation is included in triennial reviews, the monitoring process does not lead to substantive, programmatic suggestions from the state monitors. ISD programs are either in or out of compliance, according to certain rigid criteria. The SEA has, in the last five years, instituted new fiscal checks and more detailed requirements. As a staff member in this division explained:

> We have an administrative manual that was just published a year ago, and unlike previous administrative manuals in Michigan that you have seen, the administrative manual has [more detailed] interpretations...

He described the impact of some of the changes:

> We've in the last three years told locals what is an approved cost and what isn't. So it's had an impact on distribution of intermediate millage too, not just state aid. And it's also had an impact on what the intermediates can use their own millage for, if they're going to program themselves. So it's had a lot of fiscal impact and it's really been needed at this time of fiscal restraints. Everybody has to be sure that they're being treated equally. So, to me, it's had a very positive effect. I think people are more secure: special education administrators, bookkeepers and so forth, accountants are probably more secure than they've ever been about what's reimbursable and how you play the game fiscally.

In gifted education, the state asks for semi-annual written reports and on-site meetings. State officials also get informal feedback from LEAs over the telephone. In vocational education, evaluation takes the form of annual follow-ups on the placement of students from the programs. The vocational education division has also begun a more comprehensive evaluation process, prompted by tightening fiscal constraints. As one state administrator described it:

> we've developed what's called a program review and planning process, which is extremely popular, so popular we can't keep [up] with it...really gets into in-depth evaluation of seven different components from administration, construction, to equipment, facilities, the support services, placement guidance and counseling.

In every area of their operations except for general education, the ISDs received high marks for their contribution to the educational system in Michigan. In special education, they are essential:

> I think they are critical, from a couple points of view. Particularly I think in the area of compliance and in the area of monitoring. We have a strong...regulatory function for [PL] 94-142 and as a result, we have a compliance-monitoring unit here at the state department, but as well, we use the ISDs as a regulatory arm, if you will, of the State department.

The director of the vocational education division had an equally positive view of the ISD centers:

> In fact, I'm very, very satisfied with our centers. Possibly one exception, a K-12 center and we're going to do a thorough evaluation on this K-12 center... Generally speaking, our centers are doing a good job, they're very well supported by the communities and doing a good job.

The legislature has a supportive view of the ISD network as well. One legislative staffer said that between the declining enrollments and declining resources, the ISDs are needed now more than ever. The legislature views ISDs primarily as a means of saving money and providing "low incidence" programming.

The general education staff held the least positive impressions of the ISDs. While granting that the REMCs are a big asset, at least one member of the staff sees ISDs as a threat to uniform policy implementation:

> And also in the bureaucracy the ISD is that much further away from the state department of education superintendent in particular philosophy and the further away you get from that the more variation you take on...It's certainly easier to control the influence you think ought to be in place at the state level than going through ISDs that may have an entirely different philosophy.

On balance, the ISDs contribute substantially to the SEA's ability to accomplish its policy goals. As part of their positive view of the ISDs, several SEA staff members noted a recent change in the ISDs for the better. Almost everyone interviewed said that there is considerable variation in quality among the ISDs, and most agreed that a large part of the variance is a function of the the ISD superintendent. As one person put it, in the past the ISDs were:

> not used much and they weren't maybe careful in their hiring of people who were dynamic, people who could really provide the kinds of services locals needed...I think the ISD superintendents are maybe in a process of re-evaluating what their role is and what kinds of services they could

> provide to locals. And as their leadership is changing, I see some of them taking on a new kind of image and trying to provide more services.

Another administrator noted a positive generational difference:

> I tend to see over the long haul a changing leadership in the intermediate school district. Some younger people, not necessarily younger in terms of age, but younger in terms of ideas, of people who think there should be some role changes in the ISDs.

A third staff member reported that ISDs are "now beginning to bloom" as a result of a new crop of superintendents. A fourth noted that in the beginning, ISD superintendencies were places where LEA superintendents could finish out their tenure in semi-retirement: "As these people have been replaced, many of the ISDs are taking a more active role in the operation of the school districts."

B. WILDERNESS INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. Chronology of Events

1947

The Price County Board of Education is organized. Walter Barton, who has been county school commissioner since 1935, becomes county superintendent. The county office assumes jurisdiction over three school districts that employ superintendents and eighteen non-superintendency districts. The 1947-48 school year budget is $4,600. The pressing issue facing the schools is nonattendance. Because the school-aged population is dispersed over a huge geographical region, transportation is difficult. The Board also discusses the need to distribute food and clothing to encourage school attendance. However, a resolution is adopted that "each district should be encouraged to handle its own attendance problems."

1948

A county school nurse is hired. She focuses on testing for vision and hearing.

1950

Barton, the county superintendent, organizes in-service training and county-wide testing, makes arrangements for districts to get rental films, supervises school lunch programs, and presides at graduations. For four years he has been trying to generate interest in a county circulating library, to no avail.

1952

The county office now generates enough business to hire a stenographer. During the summer, one part-time clerk helps with the school census. The other staff are the nurse and the superintendent.

1954

The school nurse urges the board to set up classrooms for the retarded children of the county at county expense. The board does not indicate any interest.

1956

A parent group comes to the board to argue for classrooms for retarded children. The board sponsors a conference on the needs of the mentally retarded.

1957

Barton is repeatedly ill and unable to work. A deputy superintendency is created and filled by a local principal. Eventually the superintendent's office is declared vacant. Barton becomes a part-time consultant to the county and the principal, Eugene Webb, is named superintendent. The 1956-57 budget is $14,903.

1961

During Webb's first four years, neither the staff nor the budget expands significantly. In May, the board authorizes Webb to set up a county speech correction program as a first step in the development of a more comprehensive special education program. A speech therapist is hired. The state pays part of her salary and four local districts agree to pay for her services on a per-pupil basis. The salary reimbursement is the county's first significant state aid.

1962

For the first time, the board considers asking the voters to approve a tax levy earmarked for special education. They prepare for a vote in June, but then postpone it.

A new state law calls for the formation of intermediate school districts in all counties with school populations over 5,000. Price County has that many children. But adjacent Yates County does not. The Yates County Board of Education asks the Price County Board to annex the Yates County office to form a two-county intermediate district. The Price County Board asks the Yates Board to ask the approval of the voters of Yates County before they go ahead with the annexation.

1963

The voters of Yates County approve the proposal to join with Price County. The Price County Board approves the annexation. The Wilderness Intermediate School District (WISD) is created with jurisdiction over both counties. Its offices are located in Price County and the Price County superintendent, Eugene Webb, becomes superintendent of the WISD. The Yates County Superintendent is given the newly created post of deputy superintendent; he also takes on some responsibility for diagnostic testing in the schools. The new Board of Education includes five members from Price County and two from Yates.

Four speech therapists are hired. Ten school districts are now involved in the speech program. The WISD's special education budget for 1963-64 is $18,462. The general education budget is $29,838.

1965

The special education director of Price City (the largest community in the two county area) and a specialist from the local university present the board with a proposal for a more complete special education program. The Board agrees to ask the voters to approve a 1 mill levy for special education. In June the millage passes overwhelmingly. The superintendent and staff propose to spend the money on building special education classrooms in local school buildings. Some of the larger districts resist this idea.

1966

The local superintendents express their concern about the WISD's plans in special education. The ISD forms an advisory committee on special education, made up of local and intermediate staff and board members. As recommended by this committee, the ISD agrees to reimburse local districts for some of their added costs of special education.

Wilderness and a group of neighboring ISDs apply for an ESEA Title II grant to fund a library to serve the entire region. The library is to be located in Price City; WISD becomes the fiscal agent for the group.

The ISD moves out of the Price County Court House into rental office space.

In the 1966-67 school year, the ISD spends $46,297 for general education and $128,110 for special education.

The professional staff at WISD form a chapter of the Michigan Education Association. The board recognizes them as the official bargaining unit.

1967

Webb announces his intention to retire. The superintendency is offered to Kent Foster, a local superintendent in Yates County. When he assumes office in July, the ISD staff consists of the superintendent, deputy superintendent, secretary/bookkeeper, school nurse, five speech therapists, school diagnostician, two mental retardation consultants, and two secretaries. Foster immediately adds a part-time janitor and a vocational education consultant. In October, he also hires a special education coordinator.

A small vocational program is begun with $1.50 per student from each high school and some state aid. A vocational advisory committee is formed and a proposal takes shape to establish an area vocational center. Meanwhile, the local university announces its intention to develop a vocational program for high school students.

1968

The Board agrees to ask the voters to approve a tax levy to support the construction of a $3.7 million vocational facility. In June, the voters turn down the proposal.

Superintendent Foster surveys the local superintendents on the role of the WISD. The ISD considers mounting programs in media and data processing, as well as expanding its special education programs. A program for trainable mentally retarded children is begun.

1969

The ISD acquires rights to land in Price City to build new administration offices. The staff has grown rapidly. Special education alone now employs 23 full-time professionals including teachers and/or consultants for learning disabled children, multiply handicapped children, per-school children, and emotionally disturbed children, as well as a social worker, nurse, two diagnosticians, and 8 speech therapists.

The deputy superintendent (former Yates County superintendent) resigns. He is replaced by Michael Smyer who has been an administrator at a local university.

1970

The WISD's plans to build a new headquarters fall through as the construction costs exceed available funds. The board decides instead to buy the building they are now renting.

Foster asks the board for an assistant superintendent's position. The top administrators now include the superintendent, deputy superintendent, and the director of special education. The board does not see the need for additional administrators. For the first time, the board adopts policies describing job responsibilities, job classifications, and personnel policies. At the insistence of the professional staff union, a program review committee has been set up in each of the last three years to evaluate ISD programs, policies, and practices. The board's policies are a partial response to staff concerns. Some standardization is deemed necessary in an agency that spent over half a million dollars in the 1969-1970 school year. New programs continue to develop, including one for preschool handicapped children (jointly run with Head Start), three media and library federal grants, adult basic literacy education in Price City Prison, drug education workshops, and a state funded diagnostic program for multiply handicapped children.

1971

The ISD continues its search to find a way to improve vocational education in the two counties. An ISD staff member and some local superintendents propose to convert a closed mine in Price County into an area vocational center to serve 1,000 high school students. He also becomes the state-designated coordinator of the Career Education Planning District (CEPD) for the Wilderness region.

Foster sees the statewide development of Regional Education Media Centers coming in the spring of 1972. Responding to his urgings, the board votes to seek actively to become the center of media-related activity in its geographic region, so that it will become the logical place for a regional center.

For two years the ISD has had trouble getting proper audits performed. A new accounting firm now reports "a deterioration of the general accounting function..." The board instructs Foster to implement the auditors' many recommendations for improving internal fiscal control.

1972

The WISD now has over 70 employees. An outside data processing firm is hired to do the payroll. The first brochure describing ISD activities is printed and distributed.

The plan to build an area vocation center in a closed mine collapses as the mine site is leased to someone else. The board votes to hold another millage election. The CEPD coordinator points out that neither local high schools nor the local university have the classroom space or staff to mount a credible vocational program. The millage proposal is withdrawn.

After some ISD-encouraged consolidation of non-K-12 districts, the ISD now covers 17 districts serving 18,734 school children.

1973

Reductions in state aid force cutbacks in special education staff. Parents protest. ISD subsidies for special education to local districts are reduced. The special education director resigns. A new director is hired; he appoints six coordinators.

The local university decides to build a vocational skills center to service both secondary and post secondary students. The ISD and local districts organize many meetings with the university to review these proposals. They don't like the university's proposals, but they don't have the funds to develop their own center. They decide to try to share time in local vocational programs.

A REMC is formed in the Wilderness area, covering the WISD and two other ISDs. WISD becomes the fiscal agent.

A business manager is hired.

1974

After 8 months, the new special education director is relieved of his responsibilities. Foster takes over the job for four months, and then offers it to one of his special education teachers. She accepts.

A full time REMC director is hired.

The business manager installs a computerized data processing system for budget and finance. He also begins a small cooperative purchasing program early in 1975.

1975

The local superintendents agree not to cooperate with the local university's plans for teaching high school students in their skill center. They support an ISD-operated vocational area center. The board votes to try for voter approval of a millage increase. The election is held in April and once again the millage increase is rejected.

In the 1975-76 school year, the ISD spends $321,153 on its general education activities, $1,062,292 on special education, and $62,787 on the REMC.

1976

A curriculum consultant is hired to coordinate and improve the ISD's general education offerings. The ISD now has 101 employees and serves 113 students in its classroom programs.

The Parent Advisory Council for special education objects to the ISD's plan for special education, complaining that the classrooms are not large enough and the staffing is inadequate. Local legislators intervene on behalf of the parents, and some adjustments are made.

The ISD embarks on a spree of grant proposal writing, leading to new programs in vocational education, career education, professional development, food services, planning and evaluation, drug education, and dissemination of innovative materials. Some of these serve only the WISD area; others serve several ISD jurisdictions.

1977

Superintendent Foster turns over most authority for day-to-day administration of the district to Michael Smyer, the deputy superintendent. Foster is serving on two state advisory councils and is the President of the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators. The curriculum consultant is appointed Director of General Services. A compliance monitor is hired in special education.

The auditors report that the accounting records are now excellent.

1978

CETA funding becomes available, and the WISD launches a Youth Employment Training Program. The ISD receives the funds and contracts with local school districts to supply staff in local high schools.

Foster resigns as superintendent. Smyer replaces him. The board decides not to fill the deputy superintendent job to save money. The 1978-79 budget is just under $3 million.

1979

Vocational education activity in WISD expands dramatically. Having given up on millage as the major source of funding, the WISD now seeks state and federal grants to mount programs. CETA funding is aggressively pursued. These and other funds allow programs in job counselling and placement in 10 local high schools, career education classes, vocational and prevocational classes for handicapped students, vocational guidance for displaced homemakers (WISD's first adult-oriented program), and employability assessments. In the 1979-80 school year over $1 million flows into the ISD for vocational programs. The ISD also serves as the broker for high schools to place students in the local university's skill center programs.

1980

Smyer finally convinces the board to let him hire an assistant to the superintendent to help out with personnel, legal, and finance issues.

New programs continue to sprout in the general education area. Staff development, arts, and gifted and talented programs are begun. The REMC also continues to grow; it sets up a regional media fair and, after years of planning, a two-way emergency radio system for school buses traveling the long distances of the Wilderness region. It also begins to facilitate local purchases of small computers.

1981

As the state economy continues to decline, state aid for education is cut drastically. As a result, the ISD and its three unions face the painful necessity of lay-offs. The total staff has now reached 149.

The business manager resigns; the new assistant to the superintendent assumes the business functions in addition to his other responsibilities. The WISD now has six top administrators: superintendent and directors of special education, vocational education, general services, business and finance, and REMC.

1982

Further cuts in state aid reduce the staff to 130. CETA funds are being phased out; consolidation of federal programs into block grants will halt some of the ISDs federal grants. The ISD launches several efforts to increase local contributions to ISD activities in 1982-83. But of a total 1981-82 budget of $4,177,000, local funds accounted for only $213,000, and local school districts also face severe cuts in state aid.

2. History

In tracing the Wilderness Intermediate School District's development back to its original inception in 1947 as the Price County Board of Education, it is possible to identify five critical periods of growth and transformation. The first of these periods covers the life of the Price County Board of Education until 1962, when the Wilderness Intermediate School District was formed from the consolidation of Price and Yates Counties.

The Price County Board of Education was organized in 1947 in accordance with state mandate. Walter Barton, who had been county commissioner since 1935, was named county superintendent, and the jurisdiction of the County Board of Education extended over 21 district school officials. The first budget was $4,600. Throughout its existence, the board was a small scale, low visibility operation. Until 1961, its full time salaried staff consisted of two people -- the superintendent and a school nurse who was hired in 1948 to do hearing and vision testing. According to the board minutes, the issues that preoccupied the board were health, attendance, and the lack of library services. The board did take an active role in hiring a school nurse to coordinate and run hearing conservation and visual testing services for the entire county, and played an intermediary role in obtaining rental films for the local schools from downstate sources. However, for the most part, the board maintained the philosophical position that key issues of special education, library services, and attendance were most effectively dealt with at the local level, and therefore were not appropriately included in the County Board of Education's functions. Consequently, there was little impetus for the board to take seriously the few proposals that were presented, including those for programs to serve mentally handicapped students, establishment of a circulating county library, or services to minimize nonattendance.

In the late 1950's, some of the more progressive downstate counties were quick to take advantage of new state legislation which permitted county assessment of taxes to implement special education programs. But the Price County Board of Education consistently demonstrated little interest in initiating such programs, despite urgings from both the school nurse and concerned parent groups to build separate classroom facilities for mentally handicapped children at county expense. Clearly, the board's reticence to put a special education millage before the county voters is evidence that the board viewed special education concerns as beyond the scope of the board's role.

After 10 years of service, Barton was taken ill and eventually relinquished his post to a local principal, Eugene Webb. The annual budget was now $14,903. During Webb's first term a full time speech therapist was added to the staff at state expense, and speech services were provided to four local districts on a per-pupil basis.

In 1962, as Webb renewed his four year contract, the state legislature abolished the office of County Superintendent, creating in its place Intermediate School Districts. To meet the minimum requirement of 5000 students in an ISD region, adjacent Yates County proposed to Price County a consolidation of the two counties. After obtaining voter approval the annexation occurred, and the Wilderness Intermediate School District was formed with jurisdiction over both counties. Webb was named WISD superintendent and Yates County's superintendent (its only full-time employee) was named deputy superintendent of the WISD. The budget was $23,802. The merger resulted in a modest change in attitude about special education programs. The Yates County superintendent persuaded his board and the voters to accept the annexation in part because the two-county area could support superior special education programs.

The beginning of Webb's second term as WISD superintendent in 1962 marks the start of the second period of growth and transformation. In the first year, four speech therapists were added to the staff. The budget, which by now had doubled, was divided into separate accounts for general and special education revenues. The ISD Board proposed a special education millage which was passed overwhelmingly by the voters of the two counties in 1965. With vastly increased revenue, the special education program blossomed. The special education budget outdistanced the general education budget by nearly three times, and two consultants for the mentally retarded, two additional speech therapists, and a secretary were hired. The local superintendents, while voicing a lot of disagreement over specifics of the special education programs, got together to form an advisory committee to guide the ISD.

This growth in special education was largely attributable to the WISD's ability to overcome its reluctance to assess a special education millage. The county board had been rigidly cautious and protective of local autonomy, operating primarily in an auditing capacity as state law provided. But once it overcame its reluctance to take an active part in special education, the experience became a precedent for exploring a broader conception of the ISD role. This exploration would take three directions in the future: first, the acknowledgement and exploitation of legislative funding opportunities; second, the central distribution of services and goods, and third, the formation and implementation of new regional programs. Thus the WISD's self-image had begun to evolve in the direction of mediator between the state and the local school districts and coordinator of programs, revenues, and services whereby the local districts could benefit from economies of scale. This was a significant change from the narrow view of the county board of education as school monitor and record keeper.

This pattern of role exploration began to emerge in the second half of Webb's last term with the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965. In addition to taking advantage of the special education funding opportunities, the WISD board now sought to make optimal use of the new ESEA funding for a regional film library and other innovative programs. WISD applied for a grant in conjunction with a group of neighboring ISDs and became fiscal agent for the $40,000 awarded to build a school library at the local college in Price City. Similarly, the board was ready to think innovatively when it agreed to help in the development of an adult education program for the Price County Prison. Finally during Webb's final year as superintendent, the Board responded to the newly acquired authority to levy millage for vocational education by laying the groundwork for a high school vocational program.

Superintendent Webb announced his intention to retire in 1967, and Kent Foster, a local superintendent from Yates County was selected by the board to take over the post. This began the third critical period of growth and transformation of the WISD, which covered the 1968-1978 period of Foster's administration. The tentative role exploration of Webb's administration became much more aggressive under Foster, resulting in drastic changes in the size and scope of WISD functions. In contrast to Webb, who carefully explored the ISD's role from within a narrow legal context, Foster was guided by the philosophy that, "laws are sometimes made to be violated" and that the only limits to ISD programming were those of imagination. As Foster said, the "basic philosophy of any intermediate district is to serve and create a climate for better education for children. That's a very lofty thing, but that's what you're there for." Diversification and growth became primary goals during this period. After just two years of Foster's superintendency, the first program for deaf children had been initiated, a state funded program for the multiply-handicapped was underway, the full time staff was expanded to include 23 professionals, the general fund stood at $76,950 and Special Education had over $250,000 in revenues.

> We just grew and grew and grew. The other thing probably responsible for our tremendous growth was a large amount of money coming in from special education...10 to 50 percent of all grants earmarked for special education not only nationally, but statewide.

Foster was not thoroughly content to have special education dominate ISD services. As he put it, "I have some ambivalent feelings about it. It became the tail that wagged the dog." He actively encouraged development of other program areas.

The years that followed witnessed continued innovation and new programs. A preschool handicapped study, an adult basic literacy program, drug education workshops, a juvenile delinquency project, and career development workshops were all in action by 1971. A deputy superintendent's position was created and Michael Smyer, an administrator at a local university, took the job.

But all was not smooth in the course of this great expansion. An outside accounting firm, called in to troubleshoot auditing procedures, reported "the breakdown in several areas of internal controls." Although Foster's activity had produced tremendous funding for the ISD, Foster had been rather unconcerned with the details of accounting for the funds. In fact, one of the board members described him as an "extremely flagrant risk taker". Another administrator put it more gently in saying that Foster took a "more liberal approach to program development." Foster himself admitted, "I knew it was a little topsy-turvey. I guess that was a time when you were free wheeling and some programs were good and some were not so good. Some of them were risky." At this point the board stepped in and instructed Foster to implement the auditors recommendations for improved internal fiscal control.

Other setbacks marked Foster's superintendency. Twice, ISD attempts to levy a vocational millage failed. On the second try, Foster hired a man whose

> specific job was to pass the millage. He had a hell of a campaign. Gimmicks and stuff. It did a little better but there were still some problems with who was gonna operate it. I don't really think [one of the local districts] wanted it. In fact the mayor of [the district] got up at a meeting and said "I'm not sure we should be spending [district] money on the outlying area." ... Well, it got shot down.

By 1973, the special education budget had grown to $584,330 and Foster hired a new special education director. The director turned out to be a failure and had to be relieved of his duties. Foster recounted, "they got me out of bed to get him fired." Foster himself took over the job for a while, and then, after a long search, the position was offered to one of the special education teachers on the staff.

Overall, these setbacks did not hinder the growth of the WISD, as Foster was adept in correcting his mistakes. A business manager was hired who installed a data processing system. The teacher who took over as director of special education worked out well. Finally, Smyer, the deputy superintendent, took over the details of running the administration. Foster described Smyer as good on systems and paperwork: "he wrote all this crap up". Smyer was strong where Foster was weak. For the first time, personnel procedures were drawn up and records were kept.

The ISD continued to grow. The organization was sufficiently young and unformed that Foster's disregard for procedure and impatience for paperwork did not seriously impair its functioning. Smyer stepped in when necessary to organize and process the streams of funding produced by aggressive program activity. In addition, Foster's local roots and charismatic style won the local confidence necessary to implement the various programs, and hence legitimize them. The ISD became an exciting place to work.

During Foster's tenure, a state funded Regional Educational Media Center (REMC) that served four ISD regions was built in Price City with WISD as the fiscal agent. Smyer was instrumental in the development of the REMC and served as its director for a short while. Smyer described the REMC's development:

> The law was passed and then it was funded a couple years after ... So when the REMC came into being, then we hired a bona fide consultant... I just worked at it, as I said, I was implementing it from the beginning...

A curriculum coordinator was hired to improve general education and under his direction, a new spree of proposal writing took place for programs in vocational education, career education, professional development, food services, planning and evaluation, and drug education. WISD became the coordinating agent for a state funded job placement program that served three neighboring intermediate districts. As time went on Smyer was given more and more authority, including the general administration and supervision of the day-to-day operation of the intermediate. Foster told the board that he would "prepare Smyer to be a strong and effective candidate for the Superintendency of the district." When Foster resigned, the budget was just under $3 million and Smyer stepped right in. The deputy position was not refilled.

The fourth period of growth and development of the WISD really began back in 1977, when Smyer's organizational constraints began to have an impact on the intermediate. Under Smyer's direction, the ISD's goals were transformed from the growth and innovation made possible by Foster's aggressive exploitation of state and federal funds to planning and accountability of the programs that had been developed. This shift in attitude was evident when the board appointed Smyer rather than Foster's original protege, the director of general education who initiated much of the new program development. As Smyer himself stated, "I'm different from Foster in that I probably would monitor a lot more closely. Foster was 100% development oriented...he just didn't bother with the details." Thus, Smyer narrowed the interpretation of the ISD role to that of a regional service center, rather than an all-purpose innovator. Consistent with his philosophy of accountability, Smyer saw the need for and developed a public relations pamphlet describing the functions of the various departments of the ISD. More thorough procedures were adopted for auditing local counts of student enrollments to qualify for state aid and a compliance monitor for special education was hired.

Not everyone, however, was completely happy with the procedural bureaucracy that accompanied Smyer's accountability. One staff member for example, claimed to have to go through "all kinds of processes just to do the simplest job." In other words, some of the innovators among the professional staff found Smyers' administrative influence confining.

Smyer was aware of these tensions and tried to remain open to new ideas and possible avenues of expansion. WISD became fiscal agent for a CETA Youth Employment Training Program, and the vocational and media education programs continued to grow. Although vocational millages had twice failed to receive the endorsement of the voters, CETA funding of over $1 million in 1979-80 provided extensive offerings of vocational services. A gifted and talented program was created with funds made available in 1978. Smyer encouraged appropriate responses to real needs of the constituent school districts. For example, because WISD was a sparsely populated district spread out over vast amounts of rural land, transportation in the winter was a major problem. In the late 1970's, an innovative two-way emergency radio system for school busses was installed.

Thus until 1981, the ISD continued to grow and prosper, but it did so in a more controlled manner. The role of the ISD was refined to be responsive to local needs and service oriented, working toward innovative and economical solutions to common problems of the constituent school districts.

1981-1982 saw a further narrowing of the role of the WISD. This was imposed by federal cutbacks and a declining state economy, and marks the beginning of the most recent era for the WISD. Layoffs became necessary for the first time as state funding for ISD programs shrank. As one administrator said, the ISD had now moved into "the survival mode." The special education budget was cut by 30% and general education by 15%. Federal aid provided under ESEA was collapsed into a block grant distributed directly to the local districts on a formula basis. CETA grants were abolished. Except for some 94-142 special education funds that went directly to the ISD, it was now up to the locals to allocate federal funds for ISD use if they were so inclined.

Smyer went to the local superintendents and appealed for a share of the federal Chapter 2 money to continue ISD programs such as REMC and vocational education. Smyer recounts,

> When we learned that money would be channeled through the local school districts, Chapter 2 federal money, we decided that we best appeal to the local school districts for part of that money to continue programs which we had formerly funded with competitive grants. ... I had to break down the contract for all of the services and give a definition of the services... And the contract is alright...we got pretty good support on this.

At the time of our interviews, the local superintendents were ambivalent about turning over their grants to the ISD. The districts themselves had suffered severe cuts in state aid and the future remained uncertain. The local share of the ISD budget was only $213,000 of $4 million. Thus, even whopping increases in local funding would not permit the ISD to retain its programs at the status quo. Nevertheless Smyer and his administrators remained hopeful that financial security could be regained. Local school officials were eager to see some ISD services continue. Meanwhile the ISD staff was cut from 149 to 130, and further reductions were planned.

Thus, once again the ISD entered into a phase of re-evaluation of its role. The most likely direction to take was a central coordinator of local services that could effectively use economies of scale. The ability of the ISD to adapt in the face of severe cutbacks must be credited in part to Smyer's organizational efforts. Due to careful planning, the ISD was in shape to assess, evaluate, refine and set priorities among programs and expenditures.

3. Internal Management

The Wilderness ISD is organized into four independent program divisions, special education, vocational education, general education, and the regional educational media center (REMC). Each of the four program directors has substantial authority over the staff, budget, fund-raising, marketing, and quality of his or her program. Each manages the relationships between WISD programs and local school districts, parents, and students, and each has an independent personal relationship with state people in the relevant program areas. Within the general and special education divisions, there are smaller units that are only loosely coupled within divisions. The only central administrators are the superintendent and a director of finance and administration.

Even this level of hierarchy came relatively recently to the ISD. Until 1973 all the professional staff in all areas reported directly to the superintendent. First a special education director was appointed to supervise the various programs in special education. Then a real deputy superintendent position was created. (The first deputy was a face-saving title for the former Yates County superintendent, who principally worked as a diagnostician.) Webb never had enough staff to justify an elaborate administrative structure and Foster, who did, resisted hierarchy.

The rapid expansion of the size and scope of the WISD during Foster's superintendency created pressures toward formalization of goals and procedures as well as complicating the structure of the ISD's programs. Foster's disdain for detail and procedures led him to ignore these pressures. During his tenure, there was little formal goal setting or procedure to direct the organization in a standardized or consistent manner. Rather, programs were set up in response to new opportunities without regard to an overall vision of the goals of the ISD. Standardization came only in response to specific problems.

Foster's request for an assistant superintendent in 1970 came at a time when the organization was suffering most from its structural and procedural deficiencies, especially in fiscal matters. The board minutes reveal that an outside accounting firm "encountered what represented in our opinion, a deterioration of the general accounting function...and the breakdown in several areas of internal controls." In this context, Foster's request can be interpreted as a sign of his awareness of the need for greater formalization of the WISD, although he himself was not inclined to move in that direction. Outside experts came in to put the internal auditing system in order, and Foster began to delegate responsibility for procedural details to deputy superintendent Smyer. Smyer began by setting up personnel files and procedures. As he demonstrated considerable success in the management of paperwork and what Foster regarded as the "dirty work" of everyday operations, his responsibilities continued to grow.

Other pressures toward standardization and formalization were coming from within the organization. In a precedent setting case, the Board voted to discontinue the school nurse position in spite of a recommendation to the contrary by a labor-management committee charged with program review. For years, the school nurse had been the only professional staff member, and when the Board decided that the ISD no longer needed her, she filed a grievance with the National Labor Relations Board with the support of the union. This launched an extended grievance procedure, resolved by formal arbitration in favor of the Board in 1970. This outcome protected the right of the ISD administration to discontinue old programs as well as create new ones, thus facilitating the ISD's ability to implement its innovative strategy. However pressure from union activity forced the ISD toward meticulous documentation of decisions with major personnel implications.

In 1977 Smyer assumed most of the responsibility for the day to day functioning of WISD. When Foster retired the following year and Smyer became superintendent, he continued to press the issues of standardization and formalization. While it was evident that an institution whose budget exceeded $2.5 million needed some structural and procedural guidelines, the transition to a more formalized operation was not entirely smooth. Program directors used to Foster's style balked at the new requirements. As one of them described the change,

> Mike has more, I'd say process steps and everything to go through. ... You've got to go through the superintendent more such as on purchases, contracting, you know, all the different things like this. ... Now there's much tighter controls on everything that we got to go through. Many more things are going through the board of education now, where before we hardly had anything go through there.

Furthermore, some report that this accountability mentality has given them a "tough time." One director reported that board meetings have taken on a different character:

> I would say Mike would tend to be a person who would want it in some fashion written down...so the preparation is different...it affects the way you prepare a proposal. It has affected my style in the effect that I spend much more time now, in refining my data and my recommendations prior to bringing them to the superintendent. ... I'm not at a loss for words because I've thought that through carefully because Mike has organized my thinking to do that... We just never prepared for board meetings at all like we do now. We never met before a board meeting. We got to the board meeting and we found out what was on the agenda... First of all, the board disliked paperwork...and then it got to the point where they wanted it on paper.

Again the feelings about this new proceduralization were ambivalent as the same director also said, "In the long run, as far as I'm concerned, I've gotten basically the same results," with procedures as without.

While Smyer was quite concerned with instilling standard procedures across individual programs, he was less concerned with creating a centralized decision making process for the ISD. Communication among board members was encouraged but the program administrators are:

> all pretty much independent people. We get more for the dollar because they're not always checking whether it's ok. Which is all right and that's why I insist we do some cross communicating for their own sakes and mine. But so far, we manage, we seem to understand the frailties of the system and somehow we do communicate sometimes. ... We've worked together a lot, but we are also all flying by the seat of our pants a lot... So it's a tradeoff. As long as I feel comfortable as superintendent at understanding what they're doing, then I'm alright.

Thus, while Smyer prompted individual programs to accept common administrative procedures, he did little to encourage greater programmatic cohesion. In fact Smyer placed a high value upon the ability "to move without being inhibited." An advisory cabinet of Smyer and the five top administrators was formed in order to improve interdepartmental communication. But Smyer had difficulty in getting full attendance at meetings. In his view, the cabinet has "a long way to go before it would be the kind of unit that would go together and make a team decision...and that's alright, the only thing I would caution them to do is we need to touch base from time to time."

This loose structure of autonomous departments has been consistent with the separate funding streams for the individual programs. Special education, vocational education, and the REMC seek their own funds, with little coordination with other ISD staff. Grant monies are budgeted and spent within programs without obtaining any form of central approval. In fact, all four programs have separate accounts and outside revenues are channelled directly into those accounts. Although the board authorizes the original proposal, neither the board nor the superintendent is inclined to monitor day-to-day operations. In this system, central input was not necessary to decide how resources were best utilized. Thus far the altered funding picture has not had major impact on this system of internal resource allocation. The superintendent's confidence that established programs will continue to provide services comes in part from the knowledge that the ISD has built up a hefty fund balance. Large ISD reserves have thus provided an element of stability even when "unexpected contingencies are the rule of the day."

Thus, no real financial impetus existed to lead the WISD toward internal coherence. Program directors were responsible only for decisions involving their programs, and staff members derived their sense of professional identity from the value of their contributions to a particular program, rather than from membership in the WISD. This program autonomy was supported by powerful internal norms that too much central administrative direction would result in "wasting your time" and would inhibit creativity.

The ISD maintained mechanisms, both internal and external, to provide feedback on quality and effectiveness of programs. The first of these mechanisms was the norm of professional competence and innovation which permeated the ISD staff. Individual staff members were carefully chosen for their energetic, professional, and creative styles. A legacy of innovation evolved from Foster's administration and continued to be an important factor in maintaining program quality. As one program director described it:

> My department really had grown into what it is because of the staff we have. We recruited...some of these people before I was director. And by we I mean the ISD, has recruited leadership people, a leadership kind of person, they have energy, they have creativity, they are always ahead in their field. They're people who are not necessarily satisfied with the status quo and because of this...there's a lot of questioning going on, there's a lot of enthusiasm for children's growth.

A second kind of influence on program evaluation and quality control evolved externally with the possibility of funding through Chapter 2. As local districts considered using their Chapter 2 funds to support ISD programs, they signaled to the ISD what kinds of programs they believed in. The director of the REMC reported:

> We are in the most economically deprived time. This service, Regional Media Center Service, was identified as a valuable service by local school districts in a most effective way. They were all given an opportunity to contribute to its support and most of them [did], two-thirds of them for the very first time, and there was no hesitancy on their part at all. What that tells me is that they really value what they have.

The vocational and general ed programs are also subjected to a market test. Districts only participate if they are willing to give students and teachers release time, bus transportation, and, in some cases, fees or tuition to participate. This creates pressure on the ISD to mount programs that can generate interest among at least some of the local districts.

A third external pressure towards high quality programs is parent influence in the special education domain. The Special Education director described the ISD's parent advisory committee:

> We have a very active parent advisory committee for special education. It's not huge but we have 10-12 people in there and they are legitimately the closest thing to a parent advisory committee that I've heard about in the state. ... Our PAC is very proactive, very actively involved in advocacy for parents of handicapped kids, but also have a very great interest in working through the problems with the school districts... they've really fought some battles for their kids.

They have forced the ISD to provide space, staff, and programs for programs run within the ISD and those in the local districts. The ISD is required to be responsive to all parents of children with special needs, as state law permits parents to bring grievances against local district plans for their children to the ISD for resolution. But the responsiveness of the PAC goes beyond mere compliance with the law. In several cases the PAC has had an influential voice in setting policy direction for special education in the two county region.

Program evaluation and quality control mechanisms vary from program to program and are not monitored centrally by formal evaluation systems. Rather, quality control has been achieved through staff creativity and competence and parent influence, as well as through legally enforced procedures in special education laws and state and federal grants and contracts. Although formal evaluation systems seemed to play a minimal role in WISD services, the staff was quite sensitive to a variety of informal indicators of program effectiveness. A mission to bring quality education services to the local schools pervaded the staff and this created a sense of collective purpose.

Still the organization had to find a way to generate some internal coherence in spite of the strain of the independent directions of the divisions. This was achieved in several ways. One was the financial control and personnel procedures. Another was Smyer himself, who has tried to do some bridging across the programs. The staff members generated some coherence through union membership and shared professional norms. Finally, physical location in a single building (except for the REMC) and social events, such as the annual Christmas Party, allowed for informal contact among staff members of different programs. Thus the WISD structure, while not under tight central control, met the demands that it faced. It provided services to local districts that they were unable to provide for themselves. It was able to generate enough revenue and support to survive without drastic change.

4. Relationships with Local Education Agencies

From the perspective of the ISD staff, the ISD is responsible for bringing innovation in education to the mostly rural, sparsely populated local districts in the intermediate region. From the perspective of the local educators the ISD provides services to special populations in a context of local autonomy.

For several reasons local school districts have a perspective on the role, functioning, and evaluation of the WISD that differs from that of ISD staff. One is that WISD functions are peripheral to the basic operations of the local schools. This keeps the WISD from the center of local administrators' attention, and limits direct contact with classroom teachers, students, and parents. A second reason for differences between the WISD and the local school districts is the geographic, social, and economic composition of the Wilderness District. The 10 local districts are rural, relatively poor, sparsely populated, and geographically spread out over a very large expanse. This seriously inhibits transportation and communication between the districts and the WISD. The transportation problem is exemplified by one local superintendent's comments:

> Now [vocational education] is no longer as significant as it once was because of the cost in transportation. We were spending twice as much on transporting our students to the skills center as we were for the educational program at the skill center when they got there. So the decline in transportation reimbursement coupled with increased costs in transportation caused us to withdraw from the skills center...

The transportation barrier also makes communication difficult. Referring to erratic attendance at the meetings of the superintendent's roundtables, one superintendent said: "We tend to be isolated here, can't share thoughts easily. What is lacking is close communication between the districts."

Despite these barriers, an essentially positive relationship has evolved between the WISD and the local school districts. This relationship stems from the recognition of mutual dependence in a few critical areas. Small and isolated, the locals depend upon the ISD to provide sophisticated services. In low incidence, high expense areas, such as special education, the ISD serves to combine the efforts and resources of the districts, as well as soliciting additional funding. For programs with prohibitive start-up costs, such as the film library, the WISD has written grant proposals to obtain funding, and has acted as fiscal agent for the operation of the program. Finally, the local districts depend on the WISD to complete mandated attendance, transportation and financial audits.

The WISD thus derives its legitimacy with the local districts in two ways. First, it fulfills its state-mandated role as compliance monitor. Second it has created for itself the role of interpreter of state law, provider of special services for low-incidence needs, and innovator in education on behalf of the local districts. In the face of local resistance, incapacity, or disinterest, the WISD has also taken primary responsibility for seeking out grants and initiating new programs for the local districts.

From the local perspective, the WISD has become a useful agent in coordinating local district interests and resources to achieve common goals which supercede the capacities of any individual local district because of low incidence or prohibitive cost. Before the establishment of the REMC, teachers had to obtain films from Ann Arbor at considerable cost. REMC has greatly increased the quality and quantity of media available to interested teachers. It has had other benefits too. As one local superintendent describes them:

> ...the REMC we're involved in a number of things. We make use of their film service, their equipment repair, their 2-way radio. ... Another area that we're involved in with them is we have what we call a Wilderness School business officials group... One of the big benefits that we receive from that particular group is we're involved in cooperative purchasing which is a big money saver. ...we figure we save a number of thousand dollars a year through that program.

In special education, the ISD provides direct service to severely handicapped children and makes possible a full range of special services in the local districts through a network of cooperatives. All of the districts agree that the WISD has filled genuine local needs. Both the ISD staff and the locals see the ISD role as being oriented toward service rather than regulation. A local superintendent said,

> I will provide or use services of things that are to our district's advantage...and I will use whatever services I can to provide the best education I can. If that's through the intermediate, fine. If it's not, fine. ... I don't view them as a regulatory kind of thing at all.

The ISD staff views its regulatory function as an excuse to spend time in the schools, with legitimate access to the local districts that enhances its credibility as a change agent. The locals see the ISD regulatory duties as a necessary evil; the ISD becomes an intermediary with the SEA, to help the local districts to comply with state mandated regulations.

In addition, the local school districts appreciate the protective, tolerant attitude toward compliance monitoring that the ISD practices. Regarding 4th Friday counts which establish enrollment and bussing route accuracy, one superintendent states:

> I realize they have to do it and by rights it should be done. It causes no problem for us. I'm glad they do it [rather than the SEA doing it].

Yet another superintendent reported that,

> Special ed causes problems... I've been cited for not complying with mandatory rules. We'll probably apply for a waiver -- the ISD will have to verify our petition.

The ISD acts as an intermediary between the state and the local schools to see that the local schools are in compliance with legal standards. Although local officials sometimes object to the standards, we heard no indication that the ISD's monitoring or enforcement was harsh, rigid, or unfair. In fact, some parents were concerned that the ISD bends too far in the direction of leniency and assistance.

ISD professionals have several ways to keep abreast of local needs. The WISD has not set up formal methods of needs assessment but a general policy of open communication, supported by committees to facilitate this communication, functions to keep the WISD in tune with local concerns. As grant funds become available, the WISD prides itself on taking advantage of new opportunities. In conjunction with this attitude of innovation, the WISD staff is sensitive to the fact that the district is comprised of mostly small, rural communities that are slow to change. With this in mind, friendly channels of communication are kept open between the locals and the WISD. Most of the local superintendents volunteered the opinion that the WISD superintendent is readily available and generally friendly toward the local district members. One superintendent reports:

> [The superintendent] comes without particular concerns just to talk. When ISD people are here in the building for some reason, they stop in to say hello. Seems to make the tie a little tighter.

In addition to informal channels, a number of formal committees serve to solicit local advice and feedback about ISD decisions and activities. The ISD Board of Education is elected by local school board representatives. In a public relations pamphlet published by the WISD, one of the board's stated objectives is to, "focus attention upon the improvement of existing services and programs." When asked whether she consulted with local people about issues before the board, one board member responded:

> Well, not in an official way. I had friends that were on several [local] boards. I would talk with them sometimes about what was going on.

Several of the board members have served on local boards themselves, and a few serve concurrently on local and ISD boards.

But the board is not the chief channel of consultation. Board members are lay people with little personal stake in the ISD's programs. The local superintendents are the ISD's most knowledgeable and concerned stakeholders. Formal consultation with the superintendents occurs at the monthly superintendent's roundtable discussions. While the feelings about the roundtable discussions are generally favorable, they are not intense, and attendance is erratic. One superintendent from a one school elementary school district explained that he doesn't necessarily share the problems of the superintendents of the larger K-12 districts.

> I generally get a lot of useful information from the group. But again, the only problem being...they have problems that I typically don't have to deal with...

Another superintendent reported:

> I was one of the poorer attendants...we're asked to offer items for the agenda, there's no difficulty getting something on.

The superintendents share a strong commitment to local autonomy, a reluctance to interfere with each other or the ISD, and, with a few exceptions, a general predisposition against cooperative efforts.

Finally, many of the WISD programs have local advisory committees to obtain a more direct kind of local input. The Regional Educational Media Center, the Vocational Education program, and the Curriculum Development program all use local people to provide guidance and feedback. The Special Education Program has a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC), as well as regular meetings of local special education personnel. A former PAC member who now serves on the ISD Board describes the special education PAC:

> The intermediate staff was very helpful. [The special education program director was on] all the years that I was on PAC. Attended all our meetings. Reported things back and forth from the board to us and from us to the board. Was very enthused about involving us in state visitations. Always open access to her office. The compliance coordinator also came to most of the meetings. One of the things that we did as a PAC was that our meetings were always housed at different schools of Price and Yates County which was really a neat thing when you consider the miles. I think that the total thing that you get as a PAC member is involvement and knowledge.

Local evaluation of WISD programs and services is limited to keeping track of the Individual Education Plans for handicapped children. However, open informal channels of communication serve to inform the ISD of local satisfaction or dissatisfaction. A WISD Board member explains:

> I think right now the performance of our people and the credibility is much better now than it has ever been...basically because you don't get the -- it's rare in the school system when anybody comes up and tells you that you do a good job. So you judge it when you don't get complaints. When you're not getting the complaints, people are more satisfied.

To the local superintendents and central administrators, the WISD is responsible for several essential educational programs as well as establishing local compliance. However, not all local officials share a view of the WISD as essential, or even useful. Evaluation of WISD programs differs radically depending upon the position of the local person. Administrators, who share frequent and friendly contact with Wilderness staff members, report favorable assessments of the WISD and its activities. One superintendent describes the relationship: "we have a good cooperative relationship with them." On the other hand, principals and classroom teachers are more negative toward the WISD and its programs. These groups have much less direct contact with the ISD staff and little knowledge of the overall WISD contribution. They resent the ISD for not being sensitive enough to their needs and those of students in regular education. The ISD staff's missionary zeal has also "irritated some of the teachers because of what we have done in breaking tradition with convention or not having our value systems that agree." A survey commissioned by the WISD in 1979 to assist in planning services, programs, and facilities, found that half of the classroom teachers in the sample thought that the ISD should offer no program services for regular students. In the words of one, "I do not support the ISD."

Although the mechanisms of evaluation are informal and intermittent, this arrangement satisfies both WISD and the local districts. Local officials are satisfied because they have little time or energy to invest in more comprehensive evaluation and monitoring. They have few standards of comparison by which to judge the merits of ISD services, so they tend to rely on informal indicators like complaints, reputations, or anecdotes from parents and teachers. The WISD staff are satisfied because they retain the discretion to run their programs as they see fit.

The arena where the local districts exert the most powerful influence is new programming. By withholding participation or support, they are able to deter the ISD from mounting some programs and they keep other programs relatively small. The WISD is able to surmount some local reluctance or indifference by going to outside funding sources and by serving other ISD regions. The ISD's substance abuse program, for example, initially received a distinctly lukewarm reception in many local schools. So the ISD began offering it to schools in the adjacent counties. The program was able to survive and improve by finding pockets of receptive principals in the broader service region, and eventually became popular in the WISD region itself. But as a rule, programs with little local support simply do not last, even when the ISD staff is enthusiastic. Thus conservatism in the local districts has constrained the ISD's ability to be as innovative and influential in the two counties as it would like to be.

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

Throughout its development as an organization, WISD has aggressively pursued relationships at the state level. The ISD superintendents and professional staff have forged extensive professional networks with other ISDs, the state legislature, SEA officials, and statewide professional groups. Contacts were made, proposals written, and numerous grants and contracts were obtained:

> Our department directors are very active at the state level. [The special education director's] a member of the State Advisory Committee, [The director of general education] has his hand in every one of those..they are our strength at the state level. When I go down there I try to make the rounds of the department and I try to visit so I can get public relations.

Even the ISD Board has visited the State Board of Education and top SEA staff. The WISD has aimed for visibility at the state level in order to obtain advantages afforded the larger, more progressive, less rural districts. Their efforts have been successful. They have achieved a respected status at the

SEA and, with state funding, have instituted impressive programs that would have otherwise been unattainable. One program director typifies the aggressive manner in which state relationships have been cultivated:

> I know all the leadership. Of course that's built up over a big time and I know the superintendent and deputy, just about everybody in the divisions. I visit them an average of once a month, but I've been there the last three weeks in a row.

He does comment with regard to the recent economic crisis, "You don't go [to Lansing] unless you have to; it's too expensive."

The elaborate, modern skills center that the ISD uses for its vocational program was obtained as a direct result of close ties with a regional state representative. Within the general education program, a motorcycle safety program was instituted because of an ISD staff member's friendship with an influential state administrator. A displaced homemaker's program was implemented with state vocational education funds and became a state model for other such programs. Thus the WISD has come to be regarded as a successful, creative educational innovator at the state level even though the recent travel budget cut-backs for state and ISD staff have restricted state-WISD contact to some extent.

Still, the reduction in state funding has exerted a profound impact on the ISD. For the first time in its history the ISD has had to reduce its staff through a series of painful layoffs. Furthermore, the cutbacks have altered staff visions of the ISD role as innovator in education. Rather than seeking to expand and improve existing programs and to bring new programs to the local districts, the ISD has been thrown into what one program director calls the "survival mode." Implementation of new programs has become impossible and some departments have trouble meeting all of their legally mandated responsibilities.

As the cutbacks took hold, the only way for the ISD to maintain its level of operation was to run down its financial reserves. The eventual depletion of these reserves will force the ISD to depend more upon its state and local constituencies for support.

C. ARROW INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

1. Chronology of Events

1947

A county Board of Education is elected in Arrow County, as required by new state law. The former county commissioner of schools, Christopher Judd, is appointed to be the new County Superintendent. The Arrow County Superintendent's office is located in the Arrow County building and has a budget of less than $10,000, which is set by the County Board of Supervisors. The total school enrollment in Arrow County is 24,412 children, of whom 13,804 attend school in Arrow City. The county superintendent's duties are to supervise small rural districts that do not have their own superintendent, monitor school attendance with the assistance of a part-time county attendance officer, compile statistics for the state, and record teacher certificates.

1948

Judd organizes a Teachers' Institute to encourage professional development for all school districts except the Arrow City district.

1949

State money becomes available to begin a speech correction program, if local districts will pay their share. Seven schools agree to participate and one teacher is hired to serve them.

1952

One home-bound handicapped child requests service from the county. Some state money is obtained to provide a tutor.

1952

The state asks the county office to audit the attendance numbers reported by local school districts. The county hires auditors and bills the local districts for 350 hours of time.

1954

Upon request of the Crippled Children's Society, the county board agrees to pay part of the salary of a full-time teacher of home-bound handicapped children in the county. The rest of the salary is paid on a cooperative basis by LEAs.

1957

The county office is now spending $68,671 to serve the 40,364 children in the county. About half of that sum is spent on the speech correctionists and the home-bound teacher.

1958

A committee of concerned citizens asks the county board to put before the voters a request to levy a tax to support special education programs. State law recently authorized counties to request elections for millage specifically earmarked for special education. Superintendent Judd is very supportive of the request. The board confers with the Arrow City board of education, which already has its own program to serve handicapped children.

1959

Arrow City school officials agree not to oppose the special education millage. Fourteen other boards of education in the county support it. Four boards oppose it. The county board votes to put the question on the ballot. In July, the millage is approved by the voters. It goes into effect immediately. In the 1959-60 school year, the county receives $469,857 in funds earmarked for special education. A binge of building and hiring ensues. Because of the drastic increase in funds handled by the county, the board starts receiving monthly financial reports and adopts its first salary schedule.

1963

As a result of a change in state law, the Arrow County Board of Education becomes the Arrow Intermediate School District (AISD). A new board of education is elected by representatives of the local school districts in the county, but the members of the county board are handily elected to the AISD board. Superintendent Judd continues in his post. The AISD takes over responsibility for its own financial and administrative arrangements from the County Board of Supervisors. Their offices are now located in a rented storefront in Mann Village, 15 miles south of Arrow City.

The special education staff has grown to 29 people. The position of assistant superintendent for special education is created.

1964

Judd and the ISD drew up proposals to offer curricular services to the local school districts. Of the ten local superintendents, six favor the development of such a service, and four, including the Arrow City superintendent, oppose it. Judd recommends taking no further action.

1965

Arrow City and the Arrow ISD agree to cooperate to build a school for trainable mentally retarded children in Arrow City at a projected cost of $450,000. When the plans are drawn up seven months later, the cost is estimated at $1,000,000. The AISD board eventually agrees to pay up to $974,800 for construction. The facility will serve children from the whole county.

1967

At the request of the local superintendents' roundtable, an AISD consultant prepares a report on the status of vocational education in the county. The report recommends that the ISD build two area vocational centers, one in Arrow City, one in the surrounding rural communities, to serve [illegible],900 high school students. The Arrow City superintendent notes that Arrow City already has an outstanding vocational program and expresses concern about turning over responsibility for that program to the ISD, which has no experience. All local superintendents except Arrow City support the creation of an ISD area vocational education center.

The full time staff of the ISD is now 57 people, compared to 17 in 1959. As the staff is outgrowing its offices, the board agrees to build a larger facility. A site is found in Mann Village.

A second assistant superintendent slot is created for vocational education.

Judd announces his intention to retire at the end of the 1967-68 school year after 25 years on the job.

Judd proposes that Arrow City share its computer and data processing facilities with the rest of the county, under ISD administration. Arrow City declines.

1968

In order to build a new area vocational center, the ISD board agrees to put on the ballot a millage increase earmarked for vocational education. Because of its size, Arrow City has the right under state law to exempt itself from the millage vote. The rest of the county votes in June to levy the vocational millage. In order to provide vocational programs while a county center is under construction, the ISD uses the millage funds to contract with Arrow City and the Arrow City Community College to run vocational classes.

A new ISD superintendent, Howard White, is hired. He had been a local superintendent in a suburb of Detroit.

1969

The special education millage no longer generates enough money to cover the costs of educating all the county's children with special needs. A millage increase goes before the voters and is approved.

The ISD establishes a data processing service. A director, 3 1/2 (full time equivalent) programmers, and a keypunch operator are hired. The board still hopes to merge this operation with Arrow City.

1971

The ISD and Arrow City agree to cooperate to build another facility in Arrow City for physically handicapped children.

1972

The AISD board accepts responsibility to serve as the planning board for a Regional Educational Media Center (REMC) to serve Arrow County and two neighboring counties.

The first comprehensive special education plan for Arrow County is written, as required under the new mandatory special education laws.

The vocational education center is opened to serve all the LEAs except Arrow City.

1974

A third assistant superintendent's job, this one for administration, is created.

The AISD board and the Arrow City board agree to establish a joint data processing operation. A Data Processing Board of Control is set up to govern the operation with two Arrow City representatives, one ISD representative, and one other local superintendent.

The ISD continues to expand. The vocational facility opens, teaching 30 occupational specialties. A full time REMC director is hired. The board decides to build another school for moderately and severely mentally retarded children, as the school in Arrow City is now overcrowded. The special education division provides a regional diagnostic service for five counties. The special education budget is now over $5 million; vocational education expenditures exceed $1 million; and general education expenditures total nearly $800,000.

1976

AISD goes back to the voters for another millage increase for special education. The increase is approved. A program is developed for autistic children.

Large flows of money and rapid increases in staff have created massive administrative problems. Cash flow has been erratic; state and federal reports are often late or inaccurate; fiscal control is sloppy. A new computerized accounting system is installed which, within a year, brings some improvement to the ISD's accounts. However, the three divisions -- special education, vocational education, and administration -- maintain separate and sometimes inconsistent personnel and administrative practices. The data processing operation generates complaints from local districts about slow and inadequate service.

1978

In May, Superintendent White is killed in an automobile accident. One of the assistant superintendents is appointed by the board to be acting superintendent. The local superintendents' roundtable volunteers its assistance to the ISD board in selecting a new superintendent. After some hesitation, the ISD board accepts the offer. Three local superintendents and the ISD board interview candidates. In August the job is offered to a local superintendent, James Zigler. He accepts.

The Arrow Developmental Center opens, operated by AISD.

1979

Superintendent Zigler and the ISD board develop a set of priorities for the ISD. Number one is reorganizing the ISD to address the needs of the districts. The list also calls for evaluations of programs, a performance appraisal system, a program of staff development, better internal budgeting and fiscal control, and better internal communication. One of the assistant superintendents resigns. Two new assistant superintendents are hired -- one for business and finance, the other for instruction. The director of the Regional Data Processing Center resigns.

A planning and evaluation office is created.

1980

A new post -- assistant superintendent for personnel services -- is created and filled.

Arrow City and the AISD disagree about the best way to continue their joint data processing center. Arrow City withdraws from the venture. The AISD continues a program to serve its own needs and some of the needs of the other local school districts.

1981

The assistant superintendent for business and finance resigns. His replacement becomes director of financial services. There are now four assistant superintendent positions.

At Zigler's suggestion, the board creates seven critical issues task forces of ISD and local staff to address the mutual needs of the ISD and the local districts: educational marketing, planning support, business and finance, curriculum and instruction, legislative relations, physical plant and operations, and personnel management.

1982

As state aid continues to decline, the board goes back to the voters for a third millage increase for special education. In spite of the gloomy economic picture, the millage passes. The assistant superintendent for special education intensifies a policy begun 10 years before to use ISD funds to encourage local districts to hire their own special education staff, rather than serving local districts with ISD-based staff.

2. History

The history of Arrow Intermediate School District is marked by three periods: origin, growth and management. The era of origin dates from 1947 to the late 1960s; we can adopt 1968 as a convenient chronological milestone. From here until the middle of 1978, the ISD experienced a period of rapid growth, both in various specific programs and in its overall role. Since 1978, the leitmotif of Arrow has been strict management. These three periods coincide almost exactly with the tenures of the three superintendents of Arrow ISD. However, these chief executives were only part of the picture; other factors were also important in the transformation of education in Arrow County.

Arrow's constituent LEAs comprise a group whose diversity would challenge any regional agency charged with promoting cooperation. The Arrow ISD region has 15 LEAs. Of these, Arrow City is the only major city. Its school district includes one-half of the county's students. Arrow City has both a significant minority population and many students who are classified as underachievers. The remainder of the LEAs are suburbs of Arrow City or outlying rural LEAs. The LEAs range in size from under 1000 to over 25,000 students. The suburban and rural areas have very few minority students or staff. The suburbs send a very high percentage of their students to college. The rural communities and Arrow City do not. Because of its size and sophistication, the Arrow City district is able to provide much of its own programming without the help of the ISD. Because of the long and troubled relationship between Arrow City and Arrow ISD, Arrow City prefers to go it alone. Currently, Arrow City is advocating a piece of legislation that would allow it (and other cities) to become their own ISDs. If successful, the secession would vastly increase the fiscal difficulties of the ISD by removing a large portion of its students and its tax base, without substantially decreasing demand for its programming.

The ISDs in Michigan evolved out of the county education system. Before 1947 the county commissioner of schools was appointed by the County Board of Supervisors. When the legislature created County Boards of Education in 1947, the county commissioner became county superintendent. The Arrow County Commissioner, Christopher Judd, was first selected at a political convention in 1943. This manner of selection influenced the quality of the county commissioners across the state; these men were often more politician than educator. However, Judd had been a teacher prior to his selection, and over the years he placed high priority on the improvement of educational opportunity in his county.

In the middle 1940s, those education commissioners who were concerned with educational issues worked toward changes in the law to establish County Superintendencies and County Boards of Education. Judd recalls that the commissioners lobbied the Legislature with two goals in mind. First, County Boards would be concerned with education for education's sake. As county commissioner, Judd had been under the formal authority of the county supervisors, who were necessarily interested in matters other than education.

Second, Judd wanted to expand the range of activities that he could pursue. The legal changes he advocated would (and did) open up new activities and funding sources to county superintendents. He took an active role in the successful lobbying effort.

So, in 1947 Judd became Arrow County superintendent, with an elected County Board of Education. The county supervisors still had the authority for his budget, but policy matters were in the hands of the county board. Arrow's board was relatively progressive due to the presence of Arrow City. Between 1947 and 1959, Judd pursued his desire to expand his role and improve Arrow's educational system. Starting in 1949, he was successful in getting the state to pay for small-scale programs that were very innovative at that time (e.g., speech correction and home-bound handicapped education). Arrow City was substantially more sophisticated than other LEAs in the county in the provision of special education services, vocational education, and media services. Judd was careful with Arrow City, and through frequent negotiation, did not push county programs on Arrow City officials. A long-time ISD staff member recalled:

> Mr. Judd was very cautious. He wouldn't do anything without a direct request from the local school districts...he was very supportive of special education, but he was careful not to usurp local prerogatives.

This is how Judd saw his role. He was supportive, yet unwilling to step on anyone's toes. He attempted to stay off of Arrow City's turf, and encouraged more and better programming in the out-county areas. Judd's supervisory duties dealt primarily with the smaller LEAs, and here he saw a critical need for special services and innovative programming.

Throughout the 1950s, Judd worked with special interest groups to develop a broad spectrum of support for Arrow County's educational programs. The Crippled Children's Society was instrumental in the origination of the first cooperative special education program in 1954 (a home-bound handicapped program). The Association for Retarded Children lobbied local boards and the county board for a millage vote designated for special education. Judd was sympathetic. But the board was hesitant. As one board member recalled:

> And so he was sympathetic with the special education concept, and he felt that children had the right to be educated. But the board did not want to put the issue on the ballot. The procedure was that they had to vote to put it on the ballot and they just did not want to.

The issue was a special education millage. Judd felt it was not wise to actively cajole the board:

> ...because people would naturally think or would tend to think that if I went out and promoted it without the backing of the citizens groups...that I would have had a selfish motive in mind, that I wanted to build an empire, so to speak.

After most of the local boards in the county voted to support it and Arrow City promised no active opposition, the county board agreed to put the millage on the ballot in 1959. At this point, Judd said, the citizen involvement he had nurtured was a "godsend."

Despite the fact that a few LEA superintendents were "less than totally supportive" because they were worried that the county might "infringe on their turf," the millage was passed by the voters. It resulted in a huge increase in special education programming, financed by almost half a million dollars brought in by the millage. Observers credit part of the acceptance by the voters to the inroads that had already been made through the county's efforts. Some of the programs funded by the initial millage were simply expansions of ongoing programs initiated by Judd prior to the millage. For example, the county financed the construction of special classrooms in local schools to provide a permanent base for the itinerant special education teachers.

The evolution of the county's non-regulatory services preceding the millage had two distinct components orchestrated by Superintendent Judd. As described above, Judd avoided an aggressive role while attempting to build support for an expansion of county services. First, he encouraged citizen involvement. A significant portion of county programming can be traced to such involvement, as was the first millage vote in Arrow County. Second, Judd worked with the local superintendents too. Much of the programming evolved because local superintendents desired it. According to Judd,

> ...some of these services from this office that preceded the millage came as a result of suggestions from local superintendents rather than from me to sit here and say that we ought to be doing this. So we took some satisfaction from that. They asked for it.

Judd did not merely wait for their requests. He encouraged their participation. As he commented on the programs of the 1950's:

> This, of course, was all a way of demonstrating, first, of providing service, secondly, it was demonstrating to the local districts that maybe there were some services that could be coordinated at a central level.

Citizen involvement and LEA desires continued to be significant after the passage of the millage. From 1959 to Judd's retirement in 1968, the county continued to grow, with new funding, and new additions to the menu of programs. Thus "origin" is a fair concept with which to characterize the period up through 1968. Arrow County became an ISD when the Legislature mandated the formal change in 1963. The change was largely a formality. As we have seen, the Arrow County Board of Education, under Judd's leadership, was providing a significant repertoire of educational services well before 1963, to all of the LEAs except Arrow City.

A staff member in special education at Arrow ISD described the years immediately following the initial millage:

> ...those first 10 years were growth years. And they were, they were fun years in that they were all very developmental. Where there had been no programs, you could start programs. Where there had been no rooms, we built rooms. There were rooms built in almost every school. We could use the intermediate millage to build rooms and dedicate them for special education for handicapped children.

He continued, recalling some of the new areas of programming and the sources of origin:

> The growth was especially fast in the area of mental retardation -- you can understand why when citizens for the Arrow association, when the parents who represented mentally-retarded children pushed the millage, you can imagine that was one of the first areas. Other areas got started; speech therapy expanded rapidly too...

At Judd's suggestion, one parent activist who had supported the millage campaign ran successfully for the county board, giving the parents a permanent voice on the board. Other groups were also involved in the developments of the early 1960s:

> The Association for Retarded Children -- that was the powerful group. There were other groups...there were parent groups representing deaf and hard of hearing children. There were parent groups that were active for physically handicapped. Cerebral Palsy Association, CP has been active in this area.

The Michigan Department of Education played an increasingly supportive role in this period as well. Judd recalls that in the 1950s, the specialists in the SEA were skeptical about the ability of the county to deliver quality services; the SEA had assigned mostly regulatory functions to county systems. But as Arrow's service capacity developed, and as LEA staff and parents proffered positive feedback to the SEA about the county's services, the SEA's doubts dissipated. ISD personnel said that the SEA was particularly supportive of Arrow's entry into vocational education in the mid 1960s.

The move into vocational education came after the county had been transformed into an ISD in 1963. The board remained the same, and Judd remained as ISD Superintendent. The staff was still quite small, with fewer than 10 people in the rented headquarters, and an LEA-based (often itinerant) special education staff of 35 specialists. The major change involved in becoming an ISD was the transfer of all administrative functions from the county board of supervisors to the ISD itself (which inexorably led to an increase in staff). The name change seemed significant at the time, according to Judd, principally because it paved the way for eventual consolidation of ISDs. Such consolidation (which never happened) would have been more difficult, it was thought, if regional units were called County School Districts.

During the late sixties the major infusion of innovation and funding came in vocational education. Years of delicate negotiation with the local districts culminated in a plan for an area vocational center that excluded Arrow City. Arrow City preferred to continue its own successful program, and the City board of education refused to put the vocational millage question before the Arrow City voters. In 1968, all the other voters in the county approved a millage earmarked for vocational education in a center to be built and operated by the AISD.

The area vocational center was not the only building that the ISD was planning. The staff had outgrown the rented headquarters and some began to lobby the board to build an ISD center with significant potential for expansion. Although Judd was dubious about such ambitious and expensive plans, he and the board agreed to acquire land on which to build a headquarters and the vocational center. The new building was significant not only for expanded facilities. It signalled a shift of focus for the ISD from a provider of primarily special education programs to a provider of many services ranging from curriculum (e.g., reading consultants) to vocational education, and administrative services for the LEAs (e.g., data processing). Special education had dominated the image of the ISD in the minds of local staff and ISD staff. With the new facility, everyone began to take the ISD more seriously in other areas.

Shortly after the decision to build the new center was made, Judd announced his decision to retire. He had been having more frequent conflicts with Arrow City. As the ISD's program offerings expanded in scope, Arrow City became increasingly hostile. Disagreements flowered over curricular, vocationals and data-processing services to which Arrow City had access but were unavailable to other districts in the county.

Judd's retirement brought in a new superintendent with a different management style. Judd's style had been quite loose. The Arrow ISD had, at this time, only the barest rudiments of formal procedure (e.g., a salary schedule). Decision-making authority was relatively decentralized because Judd's personal activities focused mainly on external factors, the LEAs and the state-level actors. The position of assistant superintendent for special education was created in 1963, and this formalized the authority held by the special education director.

Howard White, who became Judd's successor, had a different style, with important implications for the development of the ISD. His selection began a period of growth for the ISD with little focus or direction. With an increased miliage in 1969, a state mandatory special education law in 1971 (and concomitant increases in state funds), a federal special education law in 1975, and a proliferation of state categorical programs, White was destined to oversee increases in many areas of service and regulation. The early 1970s were characterized by one ISD staff member as a period of "shotgun" entrepreneurship.

The combination of increased funds and stricter requirements in special education resulted in more age and disability categories being served, as well as a shift in the role or influence of Arrow ISD. After 1971, special education programs served children from birth to age 26. The ISD developed comprehensive infant identification programs, tied to public and private infant care facilities. One special education official described the positive effects of this increase in comprehensiveness:

> Preprimary impaired, that was new to schools. That's zero to five. We had some programs for hearing impaired and physically impaired, below age five, prior to mandatory, but very little else. Now any handicapped child from the moment you know he's eligible for service. That's significantly different. And a real plus I think, that's really a significant thing under mandatory special education. You get early intervention; we found youngsters, frankly, that were more handicapped than they needed to be because they were not discovered early, and the parents really didn't know how to deal with the situation. We found some pathetic things, in the area of visually impaired and blind children. Their parents really didn't know. The person, the child, had no stimulation or very little stimulation, and lying in cribs, you have the

> flat head syndrome from lying in a crib. And I just really feel good about that early intervention and we have a lot of children that are less handicapped because of it.

Along with a plethora of new programs in special education resulting in large new groups of clients, the service to existing clients was improved because of the required Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and the concomitant "due process" mandated for parents. The special education director described the before and after situation:

> We too often determined a program by the labelling of a youngster, prior to mandatory. As soon as you put a label on a youngster, we knew what the youngster needed. Now, we look at the child in various dimensions and say, what does the child need? And it really is a significant difference. And I'm just outlining some of the areas there. And again another way of saying it, we educated by class or group. You knew what type A classroom needed, type A classroom for educable mentally retarded. Now the program is individualized with long and short term goals and individual performance objectives. And that was quite a switch for teachers, to go from making a lesson plan by a class for a whole group, to now look at an individuals' needs and write out some performance objectives for that child.

The appeal provisions in the law not only improved the quality of the programs, they also required the ISD to share authority for their programming. One special education official depicted the ISD's difficulty in learning to deal with the changes in authority structure:

> The sphere of influence I think changed significantly where school and special education directors determined what was going to happen. Under mandatory, parents, advocates, and sometimes what I refer to as "the martians" (the courts, the federal and state regulations, whatever), they come shooting at you and they influence how you develop programs. Sometimes they make you scratch your head, but you learn to deal with that and it's not all bad. But it was quite a switch, going from this being the good guys and developing programs, fun times, to suddenly sometimes you're the enemy because schools are suspect... But you deal with the martians and they're okay, you just learn to deal with that.

The balance between regulation and service definitely shifted: "we saw ourselves more as service units prior to mandatory." Afterwards, the regulatory roles of the state and the ISD loomed much larger.

This shift made Arrow's relationships with its constituent LEAs that much more precarious. White lacked the political caution of his predecessor. He also lacked the management skills to keep tight control over the enormous growth in the role of the ISD. One of the primary means of communication between the ISD and its LEAs is the ISD Board; White ignored the Board's potential as a vehicle for communication, keeping his board members quite uninformed. As one board member said, he practiced a "close to the chest" style.

White received some warnings from his administrative staff concerning the paucity of procedure within Arrow. In July 1975, he received a memo from his business manager indicating the manager's substantial concern over the worsening fragmentation of the organization. In 1976, White recommended that the position of personnel administrator be created to promote uniformity in intra-organizational personnel practices. Because White refused to pass negative information about the ISD to the Board, the recommendation was tabled. An April 1977 memo from the business manager to the superintendent indicated problems with the overall management system: late and inaccurate federal reports, cash flow problems and the widespread reluctance of staff to accept fiscal controls. At this time the staff was more than 800 people. The organization was handling extremely large amounts of money; a special education budget of $5 million, a vocational education budget of $1 million, and general education at $800,000. The special and vocational education programs were managed separately, with little or no coordination.

The ISD's relationship with Arrow City continued to be less than cooperative. Between 1967 and 1974, the ISD repeatedly approached the Arrow City school district concerning a joint data-processing program. Finally, in 1974, Arrow City agreed to participate in a joint program if it had equal control over the governance of the program. A separate four-person governing board for data processing was established with two representatives of the Arrow City superintendent, one other local superintendent, and an ISD representative. The ISD reluctantly agreed to this arrangement because Arrow City had a superior program and the other LEAs in the county were clamoring for better service. The joint operation was created, and the Regional Data Processing Cooperative made no mention of Arrow or ISD on its letterhead. In 1975, there were repeated arguments -- never settled to either party's satisfaction -- over which hardware to purchase. In early 1977, local clients raised concerns before the data processing board about lack of programs, difficulties in ordering products from the cooperative, and too much clerical work. The data-processing cooperative exemplified the worsening relationship between the Arrow ISD and Arrow City.

The irony of the situation is that Arrow was managed so poorly during the time of maximum resources. Then in 1978, Superintendent White died suddenly after an automobile accident. One of the assistant superintendents filled in as acting superintendent while a search for a successor was conducted. The three assistant superintendents reported that the crisis drew them together and strengthened their working relationships. The local superintendents in the county volunteered their advice and support to the ISD board, but the board was extremely reluctant to accept outside counsel. The board grudgingly conceded that the local superintendents might contribute to the selection process and permitted them to do so. In the end the board chose a local superintendent to succeed White, although the vote was not unanimous. The new Superintendent, James Zigler, was not only an abrasive personality, but some participants objected to the selection of a superintendent from within the county, rather than an outsider with no previous history in the area to live down.

Immediately after Zigler became superintendent, Arrow City announced that it was no longer willing to continue its participation in the data processing cooperative. The following year, the decline in state funding for ISD programs began. Zigler faced a steadily worsening financial situation and an uneven internal equilibrium in the two main program areas. The ISD staff was uncertain about how he would cope with these dilemmas. So were the LEAs. The collapse of the data processing cooperative was a symbolic culmination of Arrow's problems with its constituent LEAs, and Arrow City in particular. A significant minority of the local superintendents, from the most sophisticated districts, felt that the Arrow ISD was not responsive to their needs. In fact, they were right. During White's tenure the Arrow ISD responded only to persistent, concerted LEA requests for service and principally responded to the needs perceived by ISD staff and funding opportunities. Officials in Arrow City felt that the ISD had made little contribution to education in the city and was incapable of responding to the complex educational problems faced by Arrow City teachers and students.

Zigler's management style helped the Arrow ISD attain better relations with its LEAs, even in the case of Arrow City. His first priority was to increase the ISD's responsiveness to its local districts. The fiscal pressure on Arrow, and the steps he took to mitigate it have altered dramatically the internal workings of the ISD, as well as its stance toward the LEAs. His organizational innovations and reforms have made Arrow more effective externally, while centralizing internal control in the Superintendent's office. The organization has become more efficient under the pressure of sustained fiscal stress and Zigler's grip on the financial and personnel systems.

The funding cuts on the state and federal level have been dramatic. The Regional Educational Media Center funding is in jeopardy, and a dissolution of the REMCs on a state-wide basis is possible. State categorical funding for special education has been cut by more than half. When Zigler arrived, Arrow had a $2 million reserve in the special education funds; in 1982 the ISD had a half-million dollar deficit. Arrow has reduced its staff by more than 120 in the past year. The most important results of the fiscal stress are the effects on the internal management of the ISD (discussed in more detail in Part 3) and the increased dependency on local funding, and therefore the ISD's relations with constituent districts (discussed in Part 4). In order to clear up the internal organizational confusion he perceived, Zigler has implemented radical changes in the internal management of the Arrow ISD.

3. Internal Management

The management style of Zigler is rather easy to characterize, even if its implementation is still evolving. It is a style involving standardization, integration, evaluation, planning and a general tightening up of the internal structure and procedures.

A new assistant superintendent of personnel position was created in 1980, after Zigler disposed of an incompetent personnel manager. The new director began to standardize personnel policies across the various divisions in terms of hiring, vacation leaves, etc. With the support of the ISD board and at the urging of Zigler, the new director slowly developed some procedure out of the chaos that existed.

> We opened the career center and then the developmental center was built, so here we had two classroom programs side by side, operated by two different divisions of the ISD. You wouldn't have recognized them as

> belonging to the same district. Hours were different, personnel practices were different, you name it, it was different.

Zigler initiated an administrative council as part of his push for integration of the various subunits of the organization. This is a group of ten people: the assistant superintendents and the departmental supervisors. Because of the size of this council, a natural sub-group emerged which meets more often than the council. This cabinet consists of just the assistant superintendents and Zigler's administrative assistant, who functions as a deputy superintendent. At the weekly meetings of the cabinet, the staff goes over the ISD board agenda -- the board meets once or twice a month -- and their divisional activities.

Upon his arrival, Zigler became aware of the absence of almost any planning and evaluation activities. In 1979, he created a unit that would handle these chores for the ISD, and for LEAs on a contract basis. Roughly half of this unit's work is internal. The director of this unit is also part of a Special Projects Team initiated by Zigler to pursue public and private grants. He uses formal mechanisms (e.g. surveys) and informal channels for feedback. He described the informal channels:

> I get a lot of information from the assistant superintendent for instruction. And the curriculum directors and superintendents in the locals. And sometimes that feedback is direct to one of us in the department, and sometimes it is sent in letter form to James and he kicks it back to us.

This feedback contributes to their evaluation services and to their self-evaluation of their own programs. The director has a lot of discretion concerning projects to be initiated, although he always follows up on the recommendations of James Zigler.

The superintendent has also included the board in the planning process. Soon after he took over, he had the board draw up a list of priority issues for the ISD to tackle (one that emerged was the personnel problem). More recently, he and the board created task forces of LEA personnel and ISD staff to address critical issues in several areas of interest to both the LEAs and the ISD (e.g., educational marketing and finance).

Although Zigler has not transformed the organization into a rigidly centralized entity, he has shifted authority upward significantly and tightened up the general operation of the ISD. He must pass on all hirings and firings; previously the supervisors could hire whomever they wanted. He seldom circumvents his subordinates' recommendations, but he does keep a close eye on what goes on. The division directors used to have much more discretion concerning their programming. As one described it:

> There wasn't a lot of pressure from the divisions. Because they really rather liked functioning on their own. Nobody was gonna complain about that. Plus there was plenty of money and if you wanted a new program...any kind of new program you wanted, you didn't have too much trouble. There was never a money problem because there was always funding somewhere...The staff was really not unhappy with the situation because they had a tremendous amount of freedom.

Under White's lack of internal leadership, the huge river of funds pouring in to the organization elicited the natural organizational response to resource surplus: a decentralization of decision-making authority. The educational result was a surfeit of programs.

Through a combination of happenstance and Zigler's direct intervention, he has been able to choose most of his high-level subordinates. The new superintendent fired the personnel director and hired a new one as well as increasing the importance of the position. He brought in a colleague from his LEA as an administrative assistant, who serves in effect as a deputy superintendent, as evidenced both by the range of tasks in his purview, and the descriptions of him by the superintendent, other Arrow staff and LEA personnel. Many other positions were filled by Zigler after voluntary resignations and retirements. In all, more than 75% of the members of the administrative council have been hired by Zigler. This high turnover has given Zigler the opportunity to place in high-level positions people he trusts to share his sense of organizational mission.

Zigler's style is obviously much different than White's. One director noted some major differences between the two superintendents:

> ...this place has gone from what I would term a family type of operation, informal, smaller, I guess, than it is today; and I think it was a happier organization in the past. I'm not saying that happier means better, but in terms of how people felt about the organization, I think things have gone downhill... I think you had a change in top-level management when James came in who was very much, in my view a manager, a student of management. He's tried to bring forward some concepts that I think will upset people.

Most of the concepts referred to are in the area of planning and evaluation: a wage and compensation study, performance appraisals, etc. Most of the staff interviewed, as well as the ISD board members and LEA staff, view Zigler's changes with some ambivalence. On one hand, the ISD has lost its gemutlichkeit and its sense of adventure. On the other hand, it runs more efficiently and predictably, and that has its advantages. One director described the planning system under White: "we'd all go fishing." The director of one program shared with us his positive outlook concerning staff evaluation:

> The idea that you can look at several responsibilities and get your impression, share your impression of how you're doing and what needs to be done with that of your supervisor...I think it's important that we have a feeling that we're going in the right direction and doing a creditable job.

Another professional staff member commented on the improved communication since Zigler's innovations:

> Really, I don't think there's much I could ask for, that I've not gotten to make my job easier. I feel a very supportive situation exists here in terms of any times I've had problems. He's helped me address that, has brought the rest of the group together in terms of looking at some things -- that was helpful. I think we are kept well-informed, which is

> important so that there aren't some things that come up, or agreements made, that I don't know about.

Zigler also has instituted much more formal structure than White did. One staff member who observed both said,

> I would say that probably the greatest contrast that I could see would be in terms of formal operation, in that White seemed to be more informal and less concerned with standardization across divisions. I think our present Superintendent is more oriented to business operation in terms of organization and also pushed for more cooperation across divisions.

One local observer described White as "a quiet summer breeze" and Zigler as "the tornado coming across the plain."

4. Relationships with the Local Education Agencies

Since Zigler became superintendent, there has been a significant improvement in the ISD's relationships with local school people. Before 1978, the ISD operated quite independently of the local districts. Because of the special millages that flowed directly into ISD coffers, it was financially independent. The ISD paid the full cost of building and operating the area vocational center, and paid 100% of the added costs of special education for the local school districts, including the costs of building and equipping special needs classrooms and schools. As a result, there was little need for formal, intensive consultation with local officials. With a strong sense of professional commitment to doing a good job, the ISD staff developed and expanded a sophisticated set of special and vocational education programs, in some cases over the protests of local school people who were less innovation-minded. Local people saw the ISD as a separate entity, not very well integrated with their major concerns, and primarily oriented to smaller, rural districts that depended most heavily on ISD services. The ISD's location in Mann Village, rather than in one of the larger districts, encouraged this perception.

Two factors turned these relationships around. First was Zigler's determination to involve local school officials more actively in ISD decisions. Second was the common fiscal predicament that befell the ISD and all the LEAs in the early 1980's as the state economy plummeted, bringing down with it state support for public education.

Zigler's enthusiasm for local involvement can be explained in part by his background as a local superintendent who felt disenfranchised in the ISD. A framed motto on the wall of the Superintendent's conference room spells out Zigler's philosophy:

> The function of the Arrow ISD, and its reason for existence, is to help school districts within its constituency to achieve their educational goals. In this spirit, all activities and services of the ISD are complementary to programs conducted by local districts.

In this spirit, Arrow has begun to decentralize its special education programs to the LEA level. Whenever there is a vacancy in an ISD staff position, for example, a diagnostician who serves the Baker schools, the ISD offers the Baker school district the opportunity to hire its own diagnostician, and the ISD reimburses the district for the salary expense. The ISD has become more sensitive to local autonomy; the staff works carefully and politically to bring along the local boards and administrators. The ISD no longer mounts new programs because the need exists; they wait until the locals see the need and request ISD assistance. Sometimes they nudge the locals in the right direction. Nevertheless, there has been a marked change in style.

Arrow has developed several ways to maintain communication with LEAs, both for planning and evaluation. Zigler set up a flock of task forces combining LEA and ISD personnel to assess local needs in several areas. There are also three superintendents' advisory committees: data-processing, special education and general education (which includes vocational education and the REMC). These committees are subgroups of the Arrow County superintendents' roundtable, which meets regularly. At Zigler's suggestion, the roundtable meetings have recently been restructured. Every other month, the superintendents meet as usual. But in the alternate months, three subgroups meet separately to discuss common problems with the ISD superintendent and staff. Instead of all the local superintendents meeting together, Arrow City and the Arrow Community College meet together, the suburban middle-sized LEAs meet together, and the small rural LEAs meet together. This grouping has facilitated discussion of common interests, according to the local superintendents, and they prefer meetings structured in this manner. Each group uses the meetings to provide feedback and direction to ISD programs. For example, superintendents may express concern about the allocation of slots in vocational education or the quality of data-processing service. Zigler often has to justify his distribution of resources.

One drawback to the multitude of participatory mechanisms is the time required from local officials. Although local administrators enjoy the opportunity to meet, discuss, and support one another, small LEAs, with few administrators, are overloaded by the number of hours taken up by the ISD. A single person may be charged with participating in all these areas and still have to run a district.

Since the ISD board is elected by LEA boards, the board members are, at least in principle, an important link to the districts. Zigler has taken great pains to keep them informed and active. Although most of the agenda for board meetings originates with Zigler, Board members are free to add to it. One member noted the difference between Zigler and White vis-a-vis the Board:

> Zigler is also more interested in the Board, and I think their legitimate function, much more so than White. To some extent, White thought of the school board members as a necessary evil...and the result was that intermediate Board members were not particularly well informed.

Although many more ISD decisions now go to the board, the board remains quite insulated from local concerns and from ISD staff. The board members we interviewed had little or no contact with local school boards, except at election time, and collected no independent information about ISD activities, apart from that channelled through Zigler.

Local education officials expressed positive evaluation of almost all Arrow's programs. One LEA vocational education director stated his reasons for evaluating the career center so positively:

> I think it's because of the level of instruction that's offered out there and also the relationship that 80% of the instructors have with the kids. I think it is quite good.

Similar comments were made about other programs, save for data-processing. The LEAs remain dissatisfied with the data-processing services they buy from the ISD. The data-processing program, devastated during the battles over control with Arrow City, has still not recovered a clear sense of purpose or a workable method for serving local needs. But the major programs -- special ed, vocational ed, and REMC -- are highly regarded by local administrators. All of the LEAs except for Arrow City said that they would be worse off without the ISD's services.

With all of the ISD's regulatory functions, there is some tension with the service orientation of most ISD programs. As one superintendent summed it up:

> I think that [monitoring] is an unfortunate responsibility of the ISD, which always prides itself in being service-oriented and I don't see that as being well mingled with the policing responsibilities of 94-142... [That is] the only whistle-blowing activity that they've got. I think it's still possible to do bus route monitoring, to do any and all of the form monitoring that they've got. I think that's all possible to do in the name of service. But I don't think it's possible to receive a complaint from the parent and then come to the local and still be oriented towards service when you've got your badge on. It's just not consistent. I don't think the people who drafted the law, they just thought that's something that somebody should take care of and the intermediate district got stuck with it.

Zigler and the ISD staff attempt to mute the inherent conflict between regulation and service through taking the perspective of the LEAs. People who conduct the compliance monitoring for the ISD are almost without exception former local staff members. When problems emerge during ISD compliance monitoring, the ISD seeks ways to solve the problems rather than to punish the malefactors. If there is anyway to avoid reporting a problem to the state, the ISD finds it. The local districts have a clear sense that the ISD is on their side.

With all the effort in recent years to improve local-ISD relationships, the one factor that may have had the most impact was the precipitous decline in state funding for education. For the first time, local districts and the ISD had to confront the same problems. Lay-offs, cutbacks, setting new priorities, deferred maintenance, energy conservation, seeking public support for the schools and increased funding --these issues were on the minds of all the superintendents in Arrow County. They created a sense of shared purpose that seems to have worked to the benefit of the ISD. Before, many district officials saw the ISD as an independent, not terribly relevant empire, free of the political and practical demands that they faced in running their systems. After the fiscal crunch, the ISD administrators were in the same boat with local administrators, facing many of the same constraints and difficulties. The perception of a common fate increased local willingness to participate in ISD-initiated activities.

Some problems remain in the ISD's relationships with its constituent districts. One is the area of affirmative action. Although several of the local districts have significant minority student populations and have responded by increasing their minority staff, the ISD has never hired minority administrators or teachers in any significant number. Several local superintendents repeatedly expressed concern over this omission, arguing that it served to isolate the ISD from the needs of the county. But not until 1981, when a local chapter of the NAACP protested the ISD's hiring record, with attendant publicity in the local papers, was the ISD moved to adopt an affirmative action plan.

The relationship with Arrow City remains troubled. The history of conflict between the boards and superintendents has left sufficient bitterness on both sides that it is difficult to imagine much improvement in the short run. Among the professional staff, however, the problem is much less severe. In special education, vocational education, and the REMC, the ISD and the Arrow City school district have a record of occasional informal cooperation and support. The rhetoric is clear. Arrow City has its own vocational center, its own special education department, and its own film library. Arrow City officials told us that they have no need for the ISD. But at the program level they do exchange materials, ideas, and student slots with the ISD to their mutual benefit. Arrow City board and district officials see the ISD as irrelevant at best, inexperienced with the educational problems of an urban district, and damaging at worst. The ISD board and staff see Arrow City as hostile and unreasonably resistant to what the ISD believes to be obvious benefits of county-wide programs. The result, for now, is an uneasy truce.

5. Relationships with the State Education Agency

Arrow's relations with the SEA and the legislature are quite congenial. Arrow has some personnel who are well respected (e.g., the special education director) by the specialists at the SEA. The SEA has had little input into the decision-making at Arrow. The ISD has the usual array of state categorical grants in their major programming areas, like special and vocational education. Contact with the SEA is frequent, even at levels below Zigler. The staff members said they felt free to call their various contacts at the SEA whenever they had a problem, question, or suggestion. Sometimes the SEA will send someone to meetings at Arrow to explain new responsibilities or regulations.

Contact with the legislature is not so frequent. The ISD has set up a legislative support team, which encourages the LEAs to supply personnel to lobby the Legislature in rotation. In this way, the LEAs and Arrow avoid the cost of a full-time lobbyist, which other large ISDs deem useful, but still benefit from sustained representation in the capitol. The ISD does keep watch on legislative activities pertinent to ISDs through these lobbying activities.

CHAPTER VII
COMPLEXITY AND COOPERATION IN ESA REGIONS

A. THE ANATOMY OF ESA SUCCESS

In a paraphrase of the old joke about pornography, the project began with the notion that, even if we could not confidently define ESA success, we would know it when we saw it. We were wrong. ESA success (or effectiveness or performance -- the label hardly matters) was a concept that grew increasingly less clear as we learned more about it. As the reader of the preceding chapters knows by now, ESAs selected for their allegedly low levels of effectiveness turned out to be quite successful on critical dimensions. Similarly, "very successful" ESAs showed distressing deficiencies. Before analysis can reach the question of why some ESAs are more successful than others, the complexities and facets of "success" must be sorted through.

This process has links to several recent developments in the organizational literature. Researchers have traditionally focused on the attainment of basic goals, on the extent to which critical resources have been obtained, or simply on survival (Goodman and Pennings, 1977). The assumption that organizations pursue a single goal or a limited set of goals in a linear fashion appears to have given way to a recognition that many organizations pursue multiple, contradictory goals (Cameron, 1978). In a related vein, a number of researchers have observed that the outputs of some organizations lend themselves more easily to quantification than do the outputs of others. The number, quality, and profitability of units produced in a shoe factory is much more easily measured than the performance of a school, and there is less debate over the validity of the measures used. Not only do organizations vary with respect to how easily and validly performance is measured. Given multiple goals, some areas of performance within a single organization are subject to easier and more valid measurement than others.

Another recent theme in the literature on effectiveness is that most organizations have more than one strategic constituency attending to how well the organization is doing (Connolly, Conlon, and Deutsch, 1980). If many constituencies have an interest in what a given organization does, they are likely to use multiple criteria to judge performance. Different expectations will be held, different demands will be made and different conclusions will be reached about performance by different constituencies. An organization is effective to the extent that its stakeholders are satisfied that they are well served by the organization's activities. The larger the number of constituents, the more evenly distributed the power among them, and the more divergent their orientations, the more complex will be the performance demands on the focal organization. The organization's efforts to respond to those demands make it impossible to get a quick fix on overall performance.

However complex performance demands do not by themselves make it impossible to gauge success if one is prepared to take more care with the process. The case studies permit the examination of success on multiple indicators. Three seem particularly important in the case of ESAs: size, professional quality, and the maintenance of supportive relationships with state and local constituents. The naive assumption that success on one dimension would be associated with success on the others was the most obvious flaw in the original plan to select sites based on size as the indicator of success. Although size, as measured by staff, budgets, and number of programs or services, is the most traditional indicator of success, it proved inadequate in this setting.

Size is an indicator of effectiveness transplanted from the study of private sector organizations. In a market environment, size is a reasonable proxy for both product quality (higher quality products are likely to generate higher demand, enabling the firm to grow) and supportive relationships with key constituents (large firms are large because they enjoy the support of their customers and have not been confined by their competitors, employees, suppliers, or regulators). Thus size is not only easily measurable (and therefore popular among researchers) but sensible to use in some settings to judge relative performance.

Many ESAs are located in environments with some properties of markets, and measuring size does measure to some degree their competitive success at capturing resources. For example, the ESAs in Connecticut and Massachusetts are legally permitted to behave entrepreneurially to produce products and services that they may sell to such markets as they develop. The larger ESAs in these states are those that have done a better job of assessing the local and state "markets" and selling ESA programs to state and local buyers. However, all the ESAs in this study depend on more than budget or staff size for their survival. The ESAs' ability to survive and thrive often hinges on their performance on the other two indicators of professional quality and maintenance of supportive relationships. Size turns out to be unrelated to success on these dimensions.

Quality of professional services can be a crucial determinant of the ESAs' ability to attract resources. Local participation, local funding, state funding, and community support are often justified on grounds of professional quality. Quality matters because professional groups at local, regional, and state levels often share norms about appropriate professional service. For example, special education officials in local school districts, ESAs, and the SEA now have sufficient training and experience with one another to develop mutual understanding about a high quality individual education plan for an autistic child. If ESA psychologists habitually submit low quality plans, the mechanisms are in place to withdraw trust and support from ESA services. Several small ESAs (Wilderness ISD, for example) managed to thrive largely on the strength of high quality services.

Perhaps more important than the ability to sustain high quality services is the ability to sustain successful relationships with key constituents. ESAs are permitted to exist so long as they do not pose a threat to existing configurations of interests at the state and local level. To behave in a way that does not threaten state or local officials, ESAs need to walk a tightrope. Much negotiating, cajoling and nudging is involved. Such behavior is the key to effectiveness in these contexts. Yet it is neither visible nor easily measured.

The two RESAs in West Virginia are relatively ineffective as judged by size or professional sophistication. Yet they have managed to survive and enjoy the support of the local superintendents and the state Department of

Education. They have maintained low profiles in their regions, working steadily if unspectacularly to supplement existing capabilities. They have not threatened existing interests by becoming too visible or too active. Their executive directors, who serve at the pleasure of the local superintendents, understand local politics and have been careful to keep the superintendents happy. It is virtually inconceivable that a highly entrepreneurial director determined to create a highly visible showcase for regional cooperation in West Virginia would last long. Success on this count does not translate into the ability to secure ever-increasing budgets. Rather it refers to the ability to negotiate and nurture relationships with those organizations and actors on whom a focal organization is most dependent. The resource dependence perspective of Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) captures much of this dimension of organizational performance and effectiveness.

The Rural Collaborative in Massachusetts provides an interesting example of an organization that might have been judged as highly effective at some points in its history on grounds of quality and at other points on grounds of size. But on balance, it lacked sensitivity to the relationships it needed to build and cultivate if it were to survive. The rapid rise and meteoric decline of its budget illustrates the point. Despite, or perhaps because of, its rapidly increasing budget, this ESA was threatening to its local constituents and faced subsequent battles for survival.

No organization can survive without producing some tangible benefits, benefits that can be observed and communicated. However, effectiveness involves more than the production of tangible benefits. It involves an ability to respond appropriately to those interests that have fate control over the organization and its future. "Appropriately" may, under certain circumstances, mean doing less rather than more, keeping a low profile rather than achieving high visibility, or keeping size lower rather than higher. But appropriately always means, first, taking the pulse of key constituencies, and second, acting in ways that do not jeopardize the ESA's good standing with those constituencies. ESAs falter when they neglect to monitor constituent needs and preferences or when they miscalculate or ignore probable constituent responses to ESA activities.

To complicate this picture further, an ESA's success on any criterion cannot be understood independently of the legal and political context of the state in which it is located. This reality guided the original selection of a sample. The fieldwork provided overwhelming confirmation of the importance of state context. The case studies also permit us to see exactly how context shapes ESA performance.

Two sets of contextual influences, the role of legislation and the role of the state education agency, are central to this story. There are considerable differences among the states in the nature of the initial legislation regarding ESAs, the regulations issued subsequent to the legislation, and changes in the legislation over time.

The legislative context has to be viewed in evolutionary terms. Contexts change, with significant consequences for organizational performance. In Connecticut and Massachusetts, the initial legislation permitting local creation of ESAs was passed at a time when there was already considerable cooperative activity among school districts in the two states. This meant that existing ventures could play a role in shaping the very legislation that was to define the terms of their existence. In Connecticut, for example, the Joint ESC was founded in 1969, whereas Statute 10-66 defining regional educational service centers was not passed until 1972 and the Joint ESC did not officially become an ESC until 1976.

In West Virginia, SB 183 authorizing the creation of regional educational service agencies was passed in 1972, at a time when there had been very little previous cooperative activity among local school districts. The fact that West Virginia has only 55 LEAs may help to explain why cooperation was slower to develop there. But the important point is that few cooperative ventures pre-dated the law in that state. There were therefore no organized interest groups advocating cooperation who were themselves exemplars.

The laws in each state were brief and non-specific as to what an ESA might (or should) be. In West Virginia, however, the state Board of Education promulgated a set of regulations which defined in very clear and concise terms the boundaries of each of the eight RESAs, their governance structure, and the areas in which they should develop programs and services. These regulations very deliberately vested control in the local superintendents by mandating a Board of Directors for each RESA composed of local superintendents plus one representative from the SEA and by giving the Boards the authority for hiring and firing the executive directors and control over the budget. They thus formally recognized the principle of local control in the relationship between state and local interests and spelled out unambiguously the fundamentally local character of RESAs in the state.

Washington and Michigan ESAs developed in a vastly different legal context. In these two states, ESAs evolved out of formal systems of county districts. Laws specifying the boundaries, funding, governance, and activities of county districts predated ESAs and people and programs were already working at the county level long before ESAs were dreamed of. When the two states moved to transform their county districts into service agencies, they did so by making changes in these detailed laws. They thus ended up with much more specific, constraining bodies of law related to ESAs than did the three sates that started from scratch. However, unlike the three states that started from scratch, Michigan and Washington began their ESA networks with a comprehensive group of organizations already in place. This had some advantages in that these organizations had preexisting legal mandates and the capacity to execute them. However, they also had the burden of taking on new missions with employees who had been hired to achieve the earlier goals of the county system. The Michigan legislature chose to wait out the old employees, relying on turnover, attrition, and generational change to replace them with new employees better suited in temperament and training to the ESA model. The Washington legislature took a more activist path, by permitting and encouraging a series of mergers among county districts to create larger service regions that could not be served in the old manner, because of their geographical scale.

Another feature of the Washington and Michigan ESAs is the continued high level of legislative involvement with ESAs. Because legislators know they exist and are used to giving them money, ESAs in these states are more often written into other educational laws than in the first three states. For example, Michigan's 1971 special education law makes explicit provision for

ISD monitoring and review of LEA special education activities. Massachusetts' law, with very similar objectives, makes no provision for any collaborative involvement in implementing special education programs. (The Massachusetts special education regulations make reference to the possibility of using collaboratives, at local discretion.)

Over time, further differences among the states have developed. In West Virginia, there have been no changes in the initial law or the regulations issued shortly thereafter. There has been a decade of contextual stability. In Massachusetts, several technical amendments have been added to the original law, but no major changes have appeared. Here, too the context has been stable, although the conditions created by the context are much more fluid than in West Virginia. The constraints placed by Massachusetts law on the development of cooperative ventures are minimal. The collaboratives vary widely in size, boundaries, program emphases, and the range of the services they provide. There are even a few private, non-profit enterprises among them. Few constraints have yielded high variety. Connecticut has seen many more changes in legislative context than either Massachusetts or West Virginia. Several amendments and two new laws were passed subsequent to the original law. Boundaries have been established for each of the seven ESCs. Washington has put its ESDs through continual reorganization and several different funding mechanisms. Michigan ISDs have experienced much less fundamental change in legal structure and function. They, however, have had to cope with dramatic decreases in state support as the state slid into economic crisis. The nature of the legislative changes has been such that, in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Michigan considerable variety in organizational form and outcomes has been possible. Less variety emerged in Washington, partly because of the constant consolidations. Still less variety has been possible in West Virginia, because the law gave the RESAs so little to work with.

The role of the SEA has varied among the states as well. In Massachusetts and West Virginia, the SEA has been minimally active in the life of the ESAs. A West Virginia state superintendent of schools lobbied strongly for the creation of RESAs, but also played a central role in ensuring that they be under local control. An associate commissioner in Massachusetts strengthened the collaboratives' capacity to provide special education services, but the state has since retreated from his enthusiasm. The SEA in Connecticut, by contrast, has seen the ESCs as useful intermediaries in its dealings with the LEAs, and has used them in a variety of ways, both programmatically and politically. In Washington, the SEA has used ESDs primarily to achieve some of its regulatory functions and secondarily to seed innovative programming across the state. In Michigan, the SEA has actively used ISDs for both regulatory and service functions in several program areas.

Analysis of variability in state context leads to the conclusion that ESAs fit into a web of interdependencies that critical shapes their performance. State laws, politics, and programmatic emphases in the state education bureaucracy had real and distinct consequences for the ESAs studied here. The variability among these organizations in size, technology, and performance is only partly attributable to organizational variables such as the leadership or strategies of the ESAs. The quality of management clearly makes a difference, but only within a set of parameters determined by external influences.

These parameters are not immutable and can, under certain circumstances, be changed by actions taken by the ESAs. They are, to varying degrees, negotiable. As the West Virginia example suggests, organizations can be successful by living up to limited expectations. As the Wilderness ISD case suggests, organizations can also be successful by pursuing those opportunities that are not bounded by explicit expectations of their constituencies. And an organization can be successful by educating its constituencies to hold the expectations it wishes to meet. Expectations for performance are not always comprehensive or unyielding. But the central point is that these expectations constitute a set of influences on the performance of ESAs that are well known to practicing managers and that need to be taken into account by those interested in ESA success.

B. COOPERATION AMONG ORGANIZATIONS

1. Introduction

Interorganizational research has strongly emphasized the virtues of cooperative efforts, whether these are voluntary or required, formal or informal, oriented to decision making or oriented to outcomes. This is most obviously true in research about social service agencies that try to coordinate the delivery of services to clients (for example, Warren, 1967). But a concern for effective cooperation is also present in research in health organizations (White and Vlasak, 1971), employment services (Hall et al., 1977), educational institutions (Yin and Gwaltney, 1981) rural development (Hougland and Sutton, 1978), urban development (Turk, 1977), child care (Steiner, 1976), mental health (Aiken et al., 1975), and other groups of public sector and non-profit organizations. There is a parallel strain of research about cooperation among private sector firms, for example work on interlocking directorates (Palmer, 1983), diffusion of technical innovation across firms (Nelson and Winter, 1982), and responses to government regulation (Breyer, 1982).

This preoccupation with cooperation is not trivial. It is rooted in the practical questions of public administrators who seek effective and efficient ways to work together with other agencies. It is also rooted in the attractive symbolic overtones of cooperation and the rational appeal of a division of labor among organizations with specialized competence (Weiss, 1981). It shapes public policy choices, as assumptions about how and why organizations work together have direct and immediate implications for reform strategies and their anticipated outcomes.

But in spite of all this attention, it is still easier to advocate cooperation than to practice it. Many research accounts document the failures. Fundamental properties of organizational systems account for the difficulties of cooperation. Each organization seeks to preserve its autonomy and independence. Organizational routines are difficult to synchronize. Goals overlap but are not identical. Policy makers attempt to minimize the uncertainty of their own environments but are less concerned with minimizing uncertainty for others (Crozier, 1964). Van de Ven (1976) summarizes it nicely: "From an agency's point of view, to become involved in an inter-agency relationship implies (a) that it loses some of its freedom to act independently, when it would prefer to maintain control over its domain and affairs, and (b) that it must invest scarce resources and energy to develop and maintain relationships with other organizations, when the potential returns on this investment are often unclear or intangible." (p. 28)

So let us back up a step. Why do organizations ever cooperate with each other? A review of the theoretical literature on relationships among organizations turns up six possible reasons: (1) to get more resources, especially money, (2) to solve internal problems, (3) to reduce uncertainty, (4) to obey a legal mandate to cooperate, (5) to satisfy values and norms, and (6) to obtain political advantage.[2] Each reason is supported by a theoretical framework that highlights some factors at the expense of others.

This section explores the ways in which these six reasons, separately and together, help us to understand why cooperation has flourished or faltered in the nine sets of organizations surrounding the nine ESAs. (Each set included between three and sixty local school districts, the ESA, and the state department of education. I have two objectives for this analysis. One is to assess the relative success of each reason in explaining the presence and absence of cooperation in each set of organizations. Most evidence on the bases of cooperation is drawn from research that only considers one perspective. In this research multiple hypotheses permit an empirical look at the relative importance of the six reasons to cooperate in these settings. My second objective is to consider the contexts in which the six reasons offer the most powerful explanations, as a step toward clarification of the conceptual underpinnings of interorganizational research.

2. Six Reasons to Cooperate

Many researchers make assumptions about forces that create and sustain relationships among organizations and go on from there. Those researchers who have actually examined interorganizational relationships find six classes of motivations. The six are not mutually exclusive, and neither I nor the authors cited below are so naive as to expect each to operate in total isolation (Schmidt and Kochan, 1977). But if there are six plausible reasons for organizations to cooperate, it seems worthwhile to disentangle them at least momentarily.

Economic Benefits. The most widely acknowledged motive for interorganizational ties is to get more resources. The theory that best accounts for this motive is exchange theory. In an influential early statement, Levine and White (1961) proposed that organizations voluntarily interact with one another to realize their respective goals or objectives. Cook's (1977) helpful refinement emphasizes that exchange relations are "transactions involving the transfer of resources between two or more actors for mutual benefit." (p. 64) Given that organizations need each other's specialized services and products and that none has unlimited resources, an exchange theorist would expect cooperation to occur among organizations if the organizations all received benefits from each other's participation in cooperative transactions.

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[2] As my interest is intentional acts of cooperation, this list does not include mutual adjustment of other market mechanisms that result in coordinated activity although no one sets out to create cooperation (Lindblom, 1965).

The tricky part of deriving predictions from exchange theory is to bound the limitless domain that exchange, in its amoeba-like way, seems to engulf. To avoid the tautological prediction that organizations cooperate when exchange produces mutual benefit and fail to cooperate when the benefits are not worth the costs, I limit exchange to the deliberate transfer of resources for expected benefits that exceed expected costs. Of course, a sufficiently free-thinking observer may consider almost anything to be a benefit. Therefore I also limit my discussion to tangible, economic benefits. This does a considerable injustice to the breadth of exchange theory, but makes the application of exchange ideas to data much more manageable. The central prediction is that organizations cooperate with others only when they expect to receive net economic benefits from a mutual transfer of resources.

Solving Problems. Functional theories of interorganizational relations emphasize cooperation as a solution to internal problems faced by the individual organizations (Paulson, 1977). Hage's (1975) analysis suggests that "certain problems are so large and complex they cannot be handled by a single organization... There is a certain desire created to cooperate whenever there is a clear technological imperative or functional necessity for this" (p. 225, 229). Under some circumstances an organization can solve its internal performance difficulties by creating cooperative links to other organizations (see, for example, Axelrod's elegant demonstration, in press). Like exchange theory, functionalism can be extended to mean almost anything. To focus on a testable prediction, I restrict my use of problem solving to internal problems of organizational technology. In the context of the organizations examined here, that means finding ways to cope with educational and other programmatic demands on the schools. The central prediction is that organizations cooperate when by doing so they are able to satisfy demands for organizational performance on particular problems. Once these demands have been satisfied, organizations are not interested in further cooperation even if it would bring obvious economic benefits.

Uncertainty Reduction. One of the break-through insights of organization theory was that organizations seek to reduce the uncertainty in their environment as much as possible. Resource dependence is the latest incarnation of theoretical attention to this process. Beginning with Aldrich's (1976) work, there has been an outpouring of interest in his claim: that "organizations seek to manage their environments so as to reduce dependencies and uncertainties stemming from environmental actors..." (p. 420) In Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) account, an organization's relationships with others are controlled by "the nature and amount of interdependence confronted by the organization" (p. 108). Interdependence is bound up with uncertainty in complex ways. But one thing is clear. The more you must depend on other organizations for crucial resources, the more vulnerable you are to disruptions in supply. The central prediction is that organizations cooperate in order to reduce uncertainty about essential resource flows in their environments. This prediction offers a different angle than the first two, although the three are related. It suggests that net benefits are not decisive; the benefits that are uncertain are those that motivate cooperation.

It also suggests that organizational problems that hinge on resolving uncertainty outside the organization are much more important motivators than problems that can be handled with technologies that have been mastered internally.

Legal Mandate. Other researchers have been impressed with the importance of legal requirements as a reason to cooperate. For example, Hall et al. (1977) treat separately organizations that have a legal mandate to work together and organizations that do not, on the grounds that the legal mandate provides the basis of the interaction in the former case. The implicit theory is that law is determinative in organizational life. Regardless of other factors, organizations cooperate because the law requires it. In fact, one version of this argument suggests that legal mandates to cooperate are useful in just those circumstances where organizations left to their own devices will not do so (Balch, 1978). Others have emphasized the motivating qualities of the broader social legitimacy conferred upon organizations that obey legal mandates (e.g. Zald, 1970). Note that the concern here is with laws that specifically instruct organizations to cooperate. Many laws impinge on organizations in ways that may make cooperation more or less attractive. They are not germane. The prediction here is organizations cooperate when a law says to cooperate.

Norms and Values. One organization may cooperate with another because its staff believes that cooperation in and of itself is desirable. The motivator is the psychological gratification of acting in accord with those norms and values. Sometimes this gratification grows out of professional values about service, for example, that agencies working toward the same ends should work together rather than at cross-purposes (Weiss, Rein and White, 1981) and that cooperation improves service to constituencies (Mott et al., 1976). Meyer and Rowan (1976) suggest that some aspects of cooperation may serve a ceremonial function; everyone participates because everyone expects to participate. Halpert (1982) reviews research showing the importance of attitudes and ideologies (which he calls interpretive schemes) in the organization's decision to cooperate. These values may arise and persist under diverse circumstances. Thus organizations may value cooperation even though they receive little or no objective pay-off by way of economic benefits, problem solving, or the others. The central prediction is that organizations cooperate when members of the organizations believe that cooperation in and of itself is gratifying.

Political Advantage. A diverse family of theorists discuss cooperation to advance political power. Although power can be considered to be just another resource to be exchanged, Zeitz (1980) points out that "the exchange perspective tends to overlook the fact that systems of equal exchange develop dialectically into complex emergent structures in which concealment, manipulation, and domination are pervasive" (p. 86). Administrators try to accumulate political advantage for themselves, their proposals, and their organizations (Allison, 1971), and relationships with other organizations offer an obvious vehicle for this accumulation. Seidman (1976) reminds us of the implications: "To the extent that [cooperation] results in mutual agreement or a decision on some policy, course of action, or inaction, inevitably it advances some interests at the expense of others" (p. 194). Organizations may cooperate in order to achieve precisely this end. Benson (1975, 1982) has been the principal proponent of this point of view in the interorganizational literature, proposing that cooperation is one outcropping of the alignment of power and authority in a system of organizations. Organizations and the multitude of participants and coalitions within organizations have political interests, and may use links with outsiders to seek relative advantage. The central prediction is that organizations cooperate when they expect cooperation to increase their political power vis a vis other organizations.

These ideas about why organizations cooperate offer six angles from which to view cooperative relationships. All six have generated enough supporting evidence to keep them alive in the work of discerning researchers. My intention here is to take advantage of the insights and direction each provides.

3. Educational Service Agencies and Cooperative Arrangements

ESAs are created by local districts themselves, state law and regulation, or both to serve purposes that vary from region to region. But there are two nearly universal arguments on behalf of ESAs. First, they provide an organizational vehicle for school districts to cooperate with each other, which is desirable because districts seldom cooperate without such a vehicle. Second, such cooperation can result in economies of scale and improved service delivery. Working together, districts may participate in cooperative purchasing arrangements, share the expense and benefits of a computer, set up joint classes for handicapped children with unusual needs, swap spare places in specialized classes, plan jointly to meet changing legislative and regulatory demands, create a centralized arts program, share equipment and instructors for vocational education, conduct lobbying for advantageous educational policies, merge lists of available substitute teachers, run joint staff development workshops, establish a shared library of audiovisual materials, hire teachers to run drug education programs, operate and service school buses, run programs for pregnant teenagers, share information about energy conservation, new math and science curricula, accounting practices, union negotiations, or educational research. In short, many activities of many school districts may be pursued in cooperation with other school districts or an ESA.

However, all the essential activities of a school district may be carried out with no cooperation with the activities of other school districts. School districts are legally, politically, and financially autonomous from each other. The same is true of most aspects of a district's relationship to its ESA although there are important exceptions that vary from state to state. Cooperation involves a sacrifice of autonomy and an expenditure of time, energy, thought, and money. Understaffed, under-financed districts find these commodities are in short supply. So why cooperate? ESAs must find answers.

4. Cooperation in ESA Organization Sets

To understand why districts, ESAs, and SEAs cooperate in these settings, I applied the six predictions about cooperation to each of the nine organization sets. In many instances these organizations did cooperate in useful and creative ways and did derive substantial benefit from their cooperation. In many other instances, the organizations chose not to cooperate. To most observers, the pattern of choices (to cooperate or not) was inexplicable. It was clear that all organizations in all nine sets could have benefited for all six reasons from a broad range of cooperative activities. But in all cases, organizations limited their participation in cooperation and, as a result, received a few, but only a few, of the potential benefits. Why were they willing to cooperate sometimes and not others when the inducements for cooperation appeared equally compelling? That is the puzzle addressed by this analysis.

Economic Benefits. Many school district staff reported that cooperation is the result of transfers of resources among organizations for mutual benefit. As they would have put it, cooperation pays. But in fact the patterns of cooperation in the nine settings show some, but not many cases of cooperative relationships in which economic benefits were the primary motivation.

School districts need many tangible resources from external sources: students, votes in the community, tax revenues, state aid, certification of their staff, etc. But few of these resources can be obtained from other school districts or ESAs. Therefore, one might argue, the districts do not have much to gain from exchange relationships with other districts or the ESA, and therefore will not enter into such relationships. Although one can to imagine that districts might join together to extract more state aid from their state legislature, for example, there was no evidence that the idea had ever occurred to anyone. Districts simply did not view each other as potential sources of economic benefits.

Some transactions for economic benefit worked through cost reductions. The most direct path by which cooperation reduces costs is when the ESA obtains a grant from an external funding source (state, federal, or private) to serve the local school districts. The Wilderness ISD, ESD West, and the Urban Collaborative financed most of their activities with grants. The effect is to make services essentially free to local districts. All districts had to do was demonstrate their need for, say, youth employment programs financed by the Department of Labor through the Urban Collaborative or the visiting artists program funded by the Michigan Arts Council through the Wilderness ISD. If districts simply maintained their relationship with the ESA, cooperation of the most nominal sort produced services with no charge.

Other cost reductions were obtained by economies of scale. Some significant economies of scale proved attractive enough to induce local participation. For example, the two Michigan ISDs were home to a cooperative purchasing operation that permitted local districts to buy audiovisual equipment at very substantial discounts. Although few Washington districts could afford to hire a consultant for gifted education, they could share the expense of a gifted education consultant on the payroll of their ESD. Only one district in the Arrow ISD region could afford to equip an automobile mechanics classroom or other expensive vocational facilities. But all the other districts got together to build a second vocational school, operated by Arrow ISD, that none of them could have justified alone.

In a few cases efficiencies were realized through barter. For example, the Urban Collaborative in Massachusetts helped districts to share with one another staff development activities. Workshops, lectures, and training sessions offered by any one district were advertised to other participating districts so that all teachers and administrators in the collaborative region could benefit. Some duplication was probably eliminated this way, and staff were exposed to a broader range of opportunities than any single district could provide. The Arrow ISD in Michigan, together with the special education directors from the twelve districts, organized an inter-district swap of special education classrooms. For example, rather than every district creating a special program for handicapped preschool children, four local districts took the preschool children from all twelve districts. Each district reduced the cost of serving particular groups of children.

In spite of these instances of cooperation for economic benefit, money turns out to be of little help in explaining why cooperation occurs sometimes and not others. Cost was more often advanced as a rationale for cooperation than seemed justified by the pattern of local behavior. The Rural Collaborative ran a trial program in joint purchasing for one year, saved everyone thousands of dollars on supplies, and asked the districts whether they wanted to continue. Too much trouble, they said. The districts in West Virginia have elevated to an art refusals to accept economic benefits from the RESAs. The districts in the Joint ESC region refused to contribute a small fee to support a library and reference service that none of them could begin to replicate at any price. Each organization set had generated some cooperative activities while rejecting others that seemed (to me) at least as profitable. An accounting of potential costs and benefits of cooperative activities does not support the prediction that districts engage in cooperation that maximizes net resources. District administrators proved remarkably resistant to the idea of giving up discretion, money, staff or students, even when they acknowledged that mutual transfer of such resources would have yielded whopping returns.

Problem Solving. If districts seldom cooperate as economic benefit dictates, perhaps their behavior is shaped by the educational problems they face. The prediction that districts cooperate in order to solve problems is amply confirmed in our nine settings. Federal and state policies and changing social realities have required school districts to master entirely new technologies of education and administration. One of these, the revolution in educating children with special needs, has played a leading role in promoting cooperation.

Beginning in the early seventies, federal and state laws required local districts to provide every child, no matter how handicapped, with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. Where once school administrators turned away severely handicapped children who did not fit into regular classrooms, now such children had to be educated. Brigades of specialists joined district staffs. Moreover the laws required parental approval for an appropriate program of services. Many school districts, especially the small ones, floundered in the face of the vastly increased expectations. They needed help to fulfill their new obligations. In part they found it in regional cooperation.

ESAs in the five states worked to provide necessary expertise to school districts and to forge regional solutions to common problems. In all nine settings, ESAs hired specialists to serve small numbers of students in each of several districts, for example an itinerant diagnostic psychologist who could move from district to district as her services were required. In most settings, ESAs also created regional programs in special schools or classrooms to serve the severely or multiply handicapped children most difficult to serve in their home districts. Local districts actively cooperated in the development of these regional offerings because they were unable to deliver the services themselves. Cooperation flourished. But as local district personnel became more competent during the late seventies, the cooperative programs of the early seventies were displaced by local programs. Time after time, as districts acquired the ability to run their own programs, they withdrew from cooperative solutions. As a result, remaining regional programs tend to be those that require the most specialized personnel, handle the lowest incidence problems, and serve the most handicapped students.

The pattern seems clear. When school districts faced problems to which they had no adequate solutions, they sought cooperative solutions. As the districts became equipped to handle the problems, they turned away from solutions requiring cooperation with other districts. The pattern held even when regional programs were cheaper or technically superior to those that districts did for themselves.

Problem solving was also facilitated as ESAs created opportunities for local administrators to learn from each other. In all settings, school officials got together on a regular basis in varying combinations of superintendents, special education directors, business managers, data processing people, basic education directors, librarians, principals, and school board members. In each ESA region, people with similar training and responsibilities participated in meetings and committees so they could learn about what their neighboring districts were doing, share common problems, and ventilate common frustrations. The nine settings displayed widely varying levels of this sort of exchange. But every setting had at least some of it.

The state education agencies (SEAs) attempted to solve problems through cooperation with districts and ESAs. The principal problems were lack of expertise and staff positions. For example, the Washington SEA placed monitors for special education, traffic safety, and other programs on the staff of ESDs, partly as a way to circumvent state personnel ceilings. In another example, as Massachusetts phased in its special education law, local school districts were supposed to develop educational programs for their children who were temporarily or permanently resident in state institutions. Neither districts nor the state institutions themselves were capable of compliance. So the SEA turned to the collaboratives and, with money, legal contracts, and moral support, helped them to acquire the expertise and legitimacy to act on behalf of their local school districts. In the familiar pattern the SEA withdrew its money and support as soon as local districts on their own could manage to serve institutionalized children. The state's concern was for managing the problem, not for promoting cooperative activities.

Uncertainty Reduction. Local school districts, I have already noted, do not depend on each other for critical resources. However, cooperation among districts can help a local district to reduce some uncertainty about its ability to meet external demands. And, although the local districts do not need each other very much, the ESA needs its districts to reduce its uncertainties by participating in ways that sustain the ESA's legitimacy and viability.

The one critical uncertainty that districts can help each other to reduce is their ability to cope with low-incidence needs. A district is legally required to meet certain needs of any child that happens to live within district boundaries. Small districts are especially vulnerable to unexpected fluctuations in the number of children who need special programs. A small district may go for years without an autistic child and then have three show up one September. If districts participate in cooperative programs, the aggregate regional enrollments help to smooth out the lumpiness of special needs. The Joint ESC can count on serving 8-12 autistic children a year. Although no member district knows whether it will need the Joint ESC autistic program in any given year, each district can count on the program's existence. By maintaining membership in the ESA, the districts have purchased some insurance against the unpredictability of low-incidence needs.

The second point is the ESAs' uncertainty about the participation of local districts. In West Virginia, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, local districts are permitted, but not required, to become a member of their ESAs. In Michigan and Washington, local districts are required to be members, but participation in most ESA activity is discretionary. Regional activities organized by ESAs do not receive automatic cooperation from local districts. For most ESAs, this is a dilemma. Some of them reduce the uncertainty by establishing a few noncontroversial activities that local districts in the area find attractive, and by promptly abandoning any activity that local districts find threatening. This is the strategy of the West Virginia RESAs. Other ESAs seek third party funding for regional programs so that local districts can participate in cooperative programs at essentially no cost to them. The ESAs benefit from the legitimacy conferred by active local involvement, which makes possible further grants, growth, and innovation. The Urban Collaborative exemplifies this strategy. Still other ESAs become a catalyst for communication, planning, and program development among local district people and state education officials. By soliciting the active involvement of local people and addressing problems that they identify, ESAs can generate enough commitment and participation from local school districts to sustain a full menu of activity. The Joint ESC has been the best example of this approach. Or an ESA can depend on state mandates to deliver local participation. As I discuss below, this often yields the motions rather than the substance of cooperation. Most of the ESAs in Michigan and Washington that rest on their mandates have dwindled into record keeping entities.

To be deemed successful by their state and local constituencies, ESAs must keep local attention fixed on the merits of regional cooperation. Because ESAs need local districts more than local districts need them, ESAs arrange cooperative activities that operate to the advantage of the local districts. One of the reasons that cooperation exists at all in these sets of organizations is because ESAs have the incentive to create favorable conditions for cooperation to emerge.

Legal Mandate. Much is made in the literature of the compelling nature of legal instructions to cooperate. The school districts we studied did not agree. Legal mandates, by themselves, had practically no effect on the willingness of school districts to cooperate with each other or with their ESAs.

For example the Michigan SEA repeatedly charged local school districts to work with their ISDs to find ways to merge smaller districts into larger, more efficient units. The districts repeatedly refused to do so. By complying with the mandate the tiny ones could only get merged out of existence and the larger ones could see no reason to participate in painful coercion of the others. Similarly, the Connecticut Legislature's admonitions to improve teaching of basic skills by sharing resources received a stony response at the local level. The SEA tried to locate curriculum specialists in the ESAs. But many local districts believed that basic skills were a local, not a regional matter. Faced with massive disinterest in joint efforts, the state retreated.

In some cases, compliance with mandates occurs in form but not in substance. The districts go through the motions of mandated cooperation, then do as they please. Special education for handicapped children in Michigan is administered largely through ISDs. In the Arrow ISD setting, one district holds itself aloof from the joint planning and program development process. That district demands its share of funds, but its staff don't attend meetings, don't participate in regional workshops, don't swap materials or students. The ISD is able to extract from this district only the formal motions of cooperation, in spite of ISD control over both funds and legal requirements. When the Washington legislature changed its method of funding ESDs, it required local districts to contribute a fixed share of ESD core expenses. When districts resisted making these payments, ESD East worked out a way for the payment to be made in name only. When districts do not want to cooperate, laws do not have much effect.

Of course some laws have potent effects. Michigan law requires ISDs to audit local districts' enrollment figures to qualify districts for state aid based on numbers of students. Both ISDs and local districts do as they are told, although there are varying degrees of enthusiasm for the task. Both ISDs and local districts have a large stake in obtaining their fair share of state aid and there is no other way to get it. In West Virginia a 1978 law called for six audiologists, one in each RESA, to serve children with impaired hearing in local school districts at state expense. In the two RESAs we studied, the districts cooperated fully and made use of audiologist services in precisely the ways that the state had intended. It is the combination of the mandate with contingent control over indispensable outcomes that creates the incentive to cooperate.

Norms and Ideology. Some local districts cooperated with others because superintendents, school board members, principals, and teachers thought that cooperation was a good idea. Other districts did not cooperate because their staff did not place any value on cooperation. These norms about cooperation were not based on calculations about objective costs and benefits to the district that might flow from cooperation. In fact pro-cooperation norms were often strongest in districts that benefited least in an economic sense.

Norms can be powerful motivators. In five of the nine sets, at least a few central districts came to believe that cooperation was good for them and for the region. These beliefs significantly shaped district behavior. For example, both the Joint ESC and the Rural Collaborative were rocked by financial scandals that nearly destroyed them. In both cases, they were saved when local school districts actively intervened. The interventions came when the two ESAs were least able to make any objective contribution to the well-being of their local districts. The local rescuers explained that they believed that regional cooperation should be encouraged.

In ESD East, the Urban Collaborative, and the Wilderness ISD, somewhat different norms supported cooperative activities. Local people argued, "we owe it to the others" to participate in joint programs. For example, the largest district in the Wilderness ISD provided adequate vocational education for its high school students. But all the other districts together did not have enough students to serve their vocational needs at a reasonable price. Only if the largest district also joined in was the student base large enough for a workable regional program. For many years this district refused. But a new superintendent with different values was persuaded that the district's participation would promote the good of the region. For him, that was reason enough.

Other norms that worked in favor of cooperation were found in districts that valued innovation and high professional standards. Although most districts were content to do things as they had always been done, some districts, usually but not exclusively wealthy suburban districts, actively welcomed new ideas and creative perspectives. For example, one wealthy district in the ESD East region contributed considerable staff time and initiative to development of a sophisticated regional computer network, even though the district could easily have done its own data processing in-house. The district believed in regional solutions. Another norm among some teachers and principals emphasized service imperatives. If a cooperative program or activity could offer students better service than a local program, some local staff were all for it. (This norm was not widely shared. Although local staff cared deeply about service, most found it hard to believe that their services were inferior to those offered elsewhere.)

In some districts, powerful norms opposed cooperation. The largest district in the Arrow ISD region had a long history of resistance to all cooperative activities, no matter how beneficial. In RESA B, two districts refused to allow themselves even to be called members. In Massachusetts many proposals for cooperative activity were stymied by ritual invocation of local control. Decisions to forgo obvious benefits could usually be explained by these norms and values.

These results show that norms other than goal consensus influence decisions to cooperate. The school districts in these settings were universally committed to high quality education. But some of them habitually preferred to go it alone while others sought out partners. These predispositions about whether to cooperate were not the product of conscious calculations about costs or benefits of each opportunity to cooperate. In most cases the cooperators could not explain why they valued cooperation while their neighbors did not. In these districts, cooperation was valued for its own sake.

Political Advantage. Another potential reason to engage in cooperation is to secure political advantage. In these nine settings, few local actors were able to achieve political advantage through use of interorganizational ties organized around ESAs. The school districts had political goals, but they pursued them in other ways, especially the state associations of school boards, administrators, and specialists (e.g. librarians or special education directors). These coalitions were created, in part, for explicitly political purposes and they fulfilled most local needs for political action directed at state policies.

Local school districts did not aspire to influence each other. Some of the larger districts in the study saw themselves as setting an example for the little ones. But there were few active efforts to change the behavior of other districts. One partial exception was two districts who refused to join the RESA B or participate in its programs. At various points, the participating districts attempted to coax the hold-outs into the fold, because they believed that their political position would be strengthened by 100% participation. As the hold-outs persisted, however, no one in the districts or in the RESA tried very hard. In a parallel case in the Connecticut ESC, no one at the local level ever tried to entice the non-participants into membership, although a few token efforts were made by ESC and SEA staff.

But local districts have been terribly sensitive to the political reasons not to cooperate. In all nine sites, most local districts were protective of their territory and autonomy and were on guard against an over-ambitious ESA. Even where economic or educational factors would demand cooperation with an ESA, some districts refused to participate because they did not wish to legitimize the ESA's "inappropriate" activities. For example, the rural ESAs in Michigan and Massachusetts both proposed to offer advanced high school courses in science, mathematics, and foreign languages on a regional basis, because local high schools had been forced to drop such low enrollment courses. In both cases, local school people preferred to deny their students access to physics, calculus, and German rather than permit their ESA to organize high school classes.

In all five states, local school districts exerted systematic pressure in the state legislature and the SEA to constrain ESA growth and activities. All states require ESA governing boards to consist of local superintendents, local school board members, or their designees. Thus local districts may restrict ESA activities at least through formal governance, and usually by withdrawing their participation when the ESA oversteps the invisible boundaries. The ESAs are the structural center of the communication and cooperation hub, and districts have been wary of permitting power to concentrate in ESA hands.

Nor were the ESAs as useful as I predicted for taking political heat off the districts. Although four ESAs did run potentially controversial programs -- one in Connecticut for pregnant teenagers, one each in Michigan and Washington for substance abuse and one in Massachusetts for voluntary desegregation -- the districts wanted these programs run by the ESAs because it was cheaper to run them to serve a larger population base, and because all were financed by state or federal grants. Local district staff were far more aware of the cost advantages of using the ESAs for such programs than of the political advantages.

The principal locus of political activity in these settings was the state. In all five states, a State Superintendent or Commissioner at some point had clear policy goals related to cooperative activities in ESAs and attempted to influence their development. In Massachusetts the chief worked to prevent the collaboratives from becoming centrally involved in local educational programs. The Connecticut and West Virginia chiefs strongly promoted ESAs because they believed that organized regional cooperation would facilitate the local districts' ability to respond to state initiatives. In these two states, the SEA's active support (moral, financial, programmatic, and political) made it possible for local cooperation to persist and multiply. The Michigan and Washington state legislatures and Governors have been much more actively involved with their ESAs than their counterparts in the other three states. The ISDs in Michigan and the ESDs in Washington have been shaped by legislative battles between urban and rural interests and between promoters of efficiency and promoters of local control. The chiefs have taken various sides in these battles, as they saw SEA policy interests served by various arrangements for cooperation.

These activities show that the ESAs are not apolitical. They can be vehicles for political advantage. From the state perspective, they have served a valuable policy function. But from the local point of view, they were less useful and more threatening. If local officials were appropriately sensitive to the political costs of cooperation, they were unexpectedly insensitive to the possible political advantages.

5. Conclusions

The six reasons to cooperate were not equally helpful in explaining why cooperation occurred sometimes but not others among local districts, ESAs, and SEAs. Some reasons proved more muscular than previous evidence had intimated (in particular, problem solving, norms, and political advantage). Some proved less compelling (legal mandates and economic benefits). All six provided useful angles from which to view cooperative activity.

The limited helpfulness of economic benefits and legal mandates calls for some refinement of these concepts. It is surely not news to discover that organizations do not pursue economic benefits in a single-minded way. Confronted with organizations that repeatedly reject economic benefits, the exchange theorist is tempted to expand the definitions of exchange and benefits so that these rejections come to seem rational. But, if exchange is everything, than it is nothing. It does not explain why cooperation occurred in cases when few resources were traded and failed in other cases where many resources were available. My attempt to craft a testable prediction may have artificially limited the value of these ideas. But better predictions are not readily accessible in the exchange literature.

Previous work on legal mandates suffered from some conceptual confusion that can be more easily remedied. These organization sets show legal mandates standing alone, without underpinnings of supportive moral codes, political consensus, operational procedures, or systematic application of rewards and penalties for compliance. Standing alone, they are weak reeds. Why, then, have other researchers been so impressed with the potency of the law? Legal mandates often co-occur with other influences on organizational behavior, including moral codes, political consensus, SOPs, and rewards and penalties. A closer reading suggests that other researchers used "legal mandate" as a shorthand reference to a panoply of pressures that governments can bring to bear on other agencies. Because many of these pressures may apply even in the absence of a law, it is useful to separate the effects of the law per se from the effects of other government action or rhetoric.

Perhaps the most interesting result is that the cooperative behavior of different participants in these organization sets seemed to be motivated by quite different forces. The behavior of the ESAs was best accounted for by uncertainty reduction, for ESAs faced overwhelming uncertainty that had to be managed. But uncertainty did not seem to motivate much of the behavior of other major participants. The state role was best understood as a search for political advantage. Local school districts cooperated as necessary for solving technical problems. Their cooperative behavior was also guided by their internal norms about the value of cooperation, which in some cases led to more cooperation than was necessary for problem solving, and in others led to less. This pattern of findings, showing systematic differences among types of organizations, could only have emerged through analyses of multiple theories.

The relationships observed here represent an interorganizational system with some unique properties. For one thing the organizations involved are public education agencies. For another, the relationships among these agencies are shaped by a long history of legal and political bonds, and are also connected to the distribution of power and resources among state and local governments. The state pursues political goals because its authority and resources are overwhelming compared to ESAs and local districts. SEAs need policy implementation, not more resources, from local districts. Local districts also have ample access to authority and resources based on state grants of authority, state and local tax revenues, and generations of political support for local control over schools. They are driven to cooperate by increasingly complex demands for professional performance. Solutions to these problems are often available from private sources as well as from cooperative arrangements, which leaves cooperation a matter of local judgment about the gratifications of cooperation and its political dangers. In contrast, ESAs, at least at first, need resources, legitimacy, participation, and visibility, for they have no independent basis for existence without the involvement of state and local education agencies. As the years pass, ESAs can create predictable clients, as state and local agencies come to rely on ESA services. But the ESA's dependence can never be fully reciprocated, because of the historical, legal, and financial supports available to states and local districts.

The distinctive qualities of these organizations do not rule out the possibility that the results described may have more general implications. I suspect that they offer four useful lessons for the design and management of interorganizational cooperation in other settings. First, it is clear that organizations cooperate for reasons other than rational cost-benefit calculations. Offering organizations tangible inducements to cooperate will not lead ineluctably to the desired results. Second, this study demonstrates the importance of norms about cooperation. Norms can be managed and mobilized, and successful cooperation may require explicit attention to increasing the perceived legitimacy, visibility, and desirability of joint activities. Third, the most successful cooperative efforts in this study solved important problems for their participants. ESAs created to serve diffuse efficiency goals did not attract enthusiastic support. ESAs that served children with whom districts were struggling were praised to the skies. The lesson, perhaps, is that cooperation should be organized around common problems, not around common goals. Fourth, cooperation served some constituencies better than others, and the resulting distribution of benefits affected district decisions to cooperate. Architects of cooperative efforts must consider who will gain and who will lose, as well as aggregate benefits.

As for the state of theory about interorganizational cooperation, the comparative analyses reported here display the assets of the field. The six theoretical perspectives make it possible to understand cooperation on the level of the organization, the organizational network, and the larger society. They allow the discovery that different motives explain the behavior of different participants in the same organizational field. They show us that organizations may follow multiple paths to the same end. Cooperation is not merely a matter of resources, nor is it simply a power struggle or an alignment of perceptions. It grows from many roots. While no single theoretical perspective allows us to understand all instances of cooperation among all organizations, at least we have diversity and the flexibility to make the best of it. Theoretical pluralism permits us to define, refine, and use a pool of tried and true explanations. That is enough to ask.

C. THE ROLE OF ESAS IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND POLITICS

Even in times that have been hard for state and local education agencies, ESAs have grown in size and influence. The literatures on the politics of education, the implementation of educational policy, and the reform of educational practice have ignored regional arrangements. Although ESA-style programs and service do not approach the significance of the state and local contributions to elementary and secondary education, ESAs are no longer insignificant players. In several major program areas, notably special education, vocational education, media services, and data processing, ESAs in some regions have assumed a great deal of responsibility for services to students and administrators. This section examines some of the implications of these new realities.

1. Accountability and Legitimacy

ESAs are public education agencies. In all five states, they are supported almost exclusively by state and local tax dollars. In many cases, they are the sole providers of legally mandated services to school children and school officials. Yet by a wide margin they are less directly accountable to public review and control than are state or local education agencies.

Even formal provisions for ESA governance put primary control in the hands of other education officials, rather than the public. In Massachusetts and West Virginia, ESA governing boards are composed of local superintendents and school board members. In Connecticut, the governing boards are composed exclusively of school board members. The problem with this arrangement is that school board members are elected by and for their individual communities. Local voters have no way of knowing which of their local board members has been responsible for ESA governance, nor of holding any local board member accountable at election time for ESA performance. This problem is compounded by the fact that in the ESAs described here, the school board members were much less active participants in board meetings than the superintendents. For reasons of time (they often held other full-time jobs), convenience (meetings were often held during the day), and expertise, local board members generally deferred to local superintendents in dealing with the ESA. In Michigan and Washington, ESA board members were elected by local school board members. (Successful candidates were commonly former local board members.) In both states, the voters in these elections were heavily influenced by the recommendations of local and ESA administrators, for they had little incentive to elect board members to promote any other interest. In this system, too, the local electorate had no way to hold any office-holder responsible for ESA performance.

Because ESAs are relatively young institutions, and because they are highly specialized in function, they receive little press coverage. They have (to the dismay of some ESA staff) a low public profile. When we attended ESA board meetings, we frequently were the only members of the public on hand. As a rule, ESAs do not have boundaries that are coterminous with other units of government. Therefore it is difficult for press or public knowledge and interest to develop.

The upshot is that ESAs go about their business with no direct public oversight or accountability. The absence of public involvement in ESA governance has created a set of education agencies more responsive to the needs of state and local administrators than to the priorities of the public. As a result, some ESAs were able to be more flexible and innovative than LEAs in handling controversial programs. Programs for voluntary desegregation, pregnant teenagers, and drug and alcohol education were handled by ESA staff who would not have to stand before a hundred outraged parents at the next local school board meeting. ESAs were also able to avoid responding to pressures that LEAs automatically respond to. For example, the record of most of these nine ESAs on affirmative action hiring was abysmal compared to the minority staff proportions in the large LEAs in their regions. The insulation of ESAs from public pressures becomes a more serious concern as they come to control more money and assume more substantial program responsibilities.

But if ESAs have escaped the travails of public accountability, they are vulnerable to a remarkable array of effective pressures from their remaining constituents. Sate and local stake-holders have five basic ways to hold ESAs accountable for their performance: legal, fiscal, political, programmatic, and market mechanisms.

Legal mechanisms are most readily used by state legislators and administrators. Laws governing ESAs may require ESAs to undertake certain activities (e.g. collecting certain data from LEAs), prohibit them from other activities (e.g. owning property), require them to engage in specified processes of planning, budgeting, or consultation, constrain their ability to attract and retain qualified staff, involve them in new policy areas (e.g. metric education), or exclude them from others (e.g. migrant education). Although legal mandates do not automatically elicit desired behavior (as I have already discussed), they do produce pressure on the ESA to comply. Local districts may also attempt to exert legal control over ESAs through revisions in legal contracts with the ESA or in the ESA's charter or articles of incorporation.

Fiscal mechanisms are available to the federal government, state legislature, SEA, and LEAs insofar as these groups control the flow of funds to the ESA. Changes in the state aid formula or administrative grant process may induce an ESA to respond to state priorities. Control over eligibility for categorical grant and contract competitions may shape ESA program directions. Required audits dictate the ESA's budget and financial practices.

Political mechanisms of control may be exerted by state and local officials and by parent and professional associations. In their perpetual search for security and legitimacy, ESAs establish advisory councils that provide a channel for the transmission of stake-holder views. Local officials exchange their participation for influence over ESA policies. Parents of children with special needs are heavily involved by law in program decisions affecting their children. State officials meet with ESA staff (especially superintendents) to communicate state priorities. Professional groups of teachers, specialists, and administrators influence ESAs by organizing ESA staff (or threatening to do so), and by setting standards of desirable professional practice, which ESAs strive to meet.

Programmatic mechanisms are available to the same groups that have political clout, and are often used in tandem with political mechanisms. Local and state officials request new programs or services from the ESA by documenting their need for the programs or services. Parents approve educational plans for their children on the basis of observed progress, or disapprove them based on ESA failure to provide quality services. State officials make funding contingent on evaluation of program effectiveness. Local administrators and school boards decide whether to support ESA initiatives on the basis of evidence about service quality and cost. These mechanisms drive the ESAs' attention to keeping their programs and services operating competently.

Market mechanisms operate when the ESAs are not the sole providers of services to federal, state, and local funders. Frequently ESAs must compete with state and local agencies themselves, and sometimes with other ESAs or private vendors to offer certain services. Federal and state officials may allocate funds for innovative art programs, for example, and fund the best proposal. ESAs win such competitions by meeting the specifications of the funder. ESAs attract students from local districts into their programs only when local officials do not have easier or cheaper ways to serve those students. ESAs respond by making their programs convenient and cheap. The market realities keep ESAs responsive to other actors' priorities in cases where competition is a serious threat to ESA resources.

Thus there are many mechanisms for keeping ESAs responsive to outside demands. These mechanisms are present in all nine cases, although to varying degrees. The ESAs are, as a result, responsive to varying degrees to state and local concerns.

Given this distinctive set of accountability demands, it is perhaps less surprising that ESAs seek legitimacy in ways so different from local school districts. As Meyer, Scott, ad Deal (1981) describe it, "educational organizations are structurally formed, not to coordinate their own technical work, but to conform to rules institutionalized in their environments." This conformity shows up in homogeneity of school and school district structure and in shared systems of norms and expectations. Legitimacy is obtained through accreditation, credentials, standardized curricula, and common structures. ESAs do not share these common structures, norms, rules, or other paths to LEA legitimacy. Among themselves, they vary considerably in structures, technologies, methods of organizing, and aspirations for official badges of acceptance. Perhaps their distance from public view makes this heterogeneity possible.

However, like the school districts that Meyer, Scott, and Deal studied, ESAs are enormously responsive to their external constituents. It is among their immediate constituents that ESAS seek their legitimacy, not from remote state and national accreditation or credentialing bodies, nor from the voters. Thus the critical environment in which ESAs seek support and acceptance is less well-defined and rule-bound than the environments in which school districts operate. The process of achieving legitimacy is therefore more a process of gaining acceptance and participation than of engaging in more rigid rituals or meeting widely-held expectations.

The ESA's ability to respond to the separate, occasionally contradictory demands of its constituents depends, like a school district does, on internal loose coupling. Programs within ESAs are permitted to operate quite independently, even at cross-purposes if necessary (Weick, 1976). The service functions of the ESA are seldom closely monitored or evaluated by the ESA administration, unless low quality threatens the satisfaction of attentive constituents. ESA managers exercise little authority over professional staff. If the ESA's units attend to the problems of finding resources and monitoring and boosting support, the ESA is deemed by most to be performing a legitimate function.

2. Implementation of State Education Policies

State support for ESAs is premised in part on the value of ESAs to promote state policies in education. In four of the five states (Massachusetts is the exception) the legislatures and SEAs played a major role in designing and supporting the development of ESAs. But it would be a mistake to infer from this support that ESAs serve predominantly state purposes. In every ESA we studied (with the possible exception of the Urban Collaborative in Massachusetts), local districts had achieved effective control over the ESA's ability to promote state policies. This cooptation has limited the value of ESAs to the state for monitoring and enforcing local compliance with state laws and regulations. Even when ESA staff is sympathetic to state goals, local control shapes the ability of the ESAs to mount new programs or to encourage implementation in local school districts.

The ESAs walk a tightrope between accountability to their state and federal funders and responsiveness to local school administrators. As a result, their role in implementing state educational policies is far more complex than most state officials acknowledge. State law and regulations that call for ESAs to play an important role in implementation may be usefully informed by a clearer understanding of ESA capacity to influence local activities.

The importance of local context has been examined in detail by Norling (1984). He not only studied the ESDs in Washington, but also surveyed 310 local school administrators across the state about the ESD role in public education. He found that important forces shaping ESD success at implementation include characteristics of the districts (such as size, budget, professional sophistication), local predispositions toward the ESD, and local perceptions of the clarity of the ESD role. He also found that local administrators believe that their ESDs are on their side in resisting undue influence of the SEA. Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that ESAs are not the most stringent of regulators.

The theme in recent literature (Elmore and McLaughlin, 1982) about the trade-off between achieving policy goals by insisting on compliance or by offering technical assistance is a compelling one for ESA administrators. In Michigan ESA staff are often put in the position of monitoring compliance and, in some cases, even imposing penalties for noncompliance. In other states, ESA staff are informally expected to monitor compliance, especially in their relationships with local special education programs. In the course of their work, they get a good feel for the appropriateness of services offered to individual children, and the corners that LEAs cut. But the political costs to the ESAs of enforcing strict compliance with state and federal law are staggering, and the rewards are non-existent. School officials are in a position to protest strenuously adverse ESA decisions. State officials are helpless when ESAs fail to report noncompliance. The dual role is stressful, but almost always resolved in favor of serving the school district. This process reinforces the ESAs' weakness as an instrument of implementation.

3. The Design of Policy Systems

The establishment of ESAs in these five states has been supported by some shared assumptions about how to improve educational practice. Educational collaboratives, regional educational service agencies, educational service centers, educational service districts, and intermediate school districts were all created as free-standing organizations, with a resource base and governance arrangements that were formally independent of local school districts and state education agencies. These organizations were to be vehicles to encourage cooperation, provide assistance and cost-effective services to school staff and students, promote innovation, and to encourage local compliance with state policies. ESAs have never been ends in themselves; indeed, legislators express persistent reservations about the need for another "layer of bureaucracy." They are means to an end -- improvement of education provided by local school districts.

The justifications for choosing this strategy for improving local practice must be based on some assumptions about how to effect change in a complex policy system. First there must be the assumption that SEAs are not completely fulfilling their dual function of regulation on one hand and support, technical assistance, and stimulation of innovation on the other hand. Second the assumption must be that local districts left to their own devices will not cooperate, innovate, and comply adequately. If they would, then ESAs are indeed superfluous bureaucracies. Third, the creation of ESAs presumes that direct intervention in local districts by itself is not likely to achieve the desired ends. It presumes that the indirect route (i.e. creating new agencies to assist districts to improve) will be more effective in the end.

This faith in the establishment of independent service agencies to achieve policy goals is disconcerting in the face of the literature on the pathologies of government bureaucracy. Work on organizational process (such as Allison's, 1971, Model II) usually conceives of organizational inertia as an obstacle to the flexibility, creativity, and responsiveness envisioned for ESAs. Organizations, once established, seek their own survival and calcify in their own world-view. This work suggests that creating new organizations is precisely the wrong way to build more flexibility into local district practice. Although some form of cooperative inter-district arrangement may be desirable, there is no necessary reason to build an on-going organization around that arrangement.

Another reason for skepticism about ESA success in achieving ultimate improvement in practice is the considerable uncertainty about how ESAs are to accomplish this goal. Not only is the underlying technology of instruction uncertain, but the ways in which ESAs are supposed to make a difference in district implementation of that technology are unspecified in formal policy statements and in informal practice. Quite naturally, the policy goals of ESA staff have therefore shifted toward helping local officials and students do what they want to do, and away from improving the quality of education. The policy goals of state officials slide toward reducing the cost of education, but no one calculates the cost of maintaining the ESA infrastructure.

ESAs were created without any compelling reason to believe that they could do what SEAs and LEAs could not. Yet they were created, and they continue to exist even though they predictably struggle with the same dilemmas that SEAs and LEAs face. As in local districts, the special education services that ESAs provide are fantastically expensive. As in SEAs, ESA staff find it difficult and stressful to monitor and assist simultaneously. LEA reluctance to cooperate and innovate has not disappeared because regional organizations were established to facilitate the process. ESAs were burdened with inflated missions, limited expertise, and laughably inadequate resources. Their gradual capture by local administrators and drift away from educational reform comes to seem sensible and natural in light of the impossibility of their original task.

ESAs are not unique in this regard. In many policy arenas, new agencies are created to symbolize commitment to a policy objective, not because anyone knows how to accomplish that objective (Weiss, 1981). Why new organizations should succeed where old ones have failed is a question too seldom asked. The new organization symbolizes the commitment, the intention to succeed. For many policymakers, that is enough. But for those who seek policy impact, it is not enough. There are two alternative courses to consider.

First make a clear-eyed assessment of what ESAs can be expected to accomplish at what cost. For example, the evidence presented here suggests that ESAs can provide significant economies of scale in the provision of those services that LEAs are willing to use. But LEAs vary considerably in their willingness to use ESA services. Therefore the major cost advantages that are attached in principle to regional programs are much attenuated in practice. ESAs also provide a useful forum for transmitting state news to local districts, for interdistrict communication, and for mutual support and self-help, but it is not clear whether such an elaborate institutional apparatus is necessary to sustain this benefit. Other outcomes of ESA activities may be examined in the same way.

Second, consider alternate policy mechanisms for achieving the same outcomes or a closer approximation of the original goals. For example, improved technical assistance to help districts implement complex legislation can be offered by private contractors to the SEA on an as-needed basis. Temporary coalitions of school districts can be pulled together for particular purposes, such as to improve staff development offerings. The SEA can increase its own auditing, monitoring, and compliance staff, or move part of its staff into regional state offices to maintain closer contact with local districts. Many ESA activities can be pursued with positive results through alternate means.

States contemplating ESA creation or redesign should give serious consideration to these alternatives and their feasibility. Articulating the theory underlying the choice of ESAs to solve educational problems in these five states reveals considerable confusion about how to achieve desired change. Sometimes the ESAs succeed brilliantly despite the confusion. More often, they do not.

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